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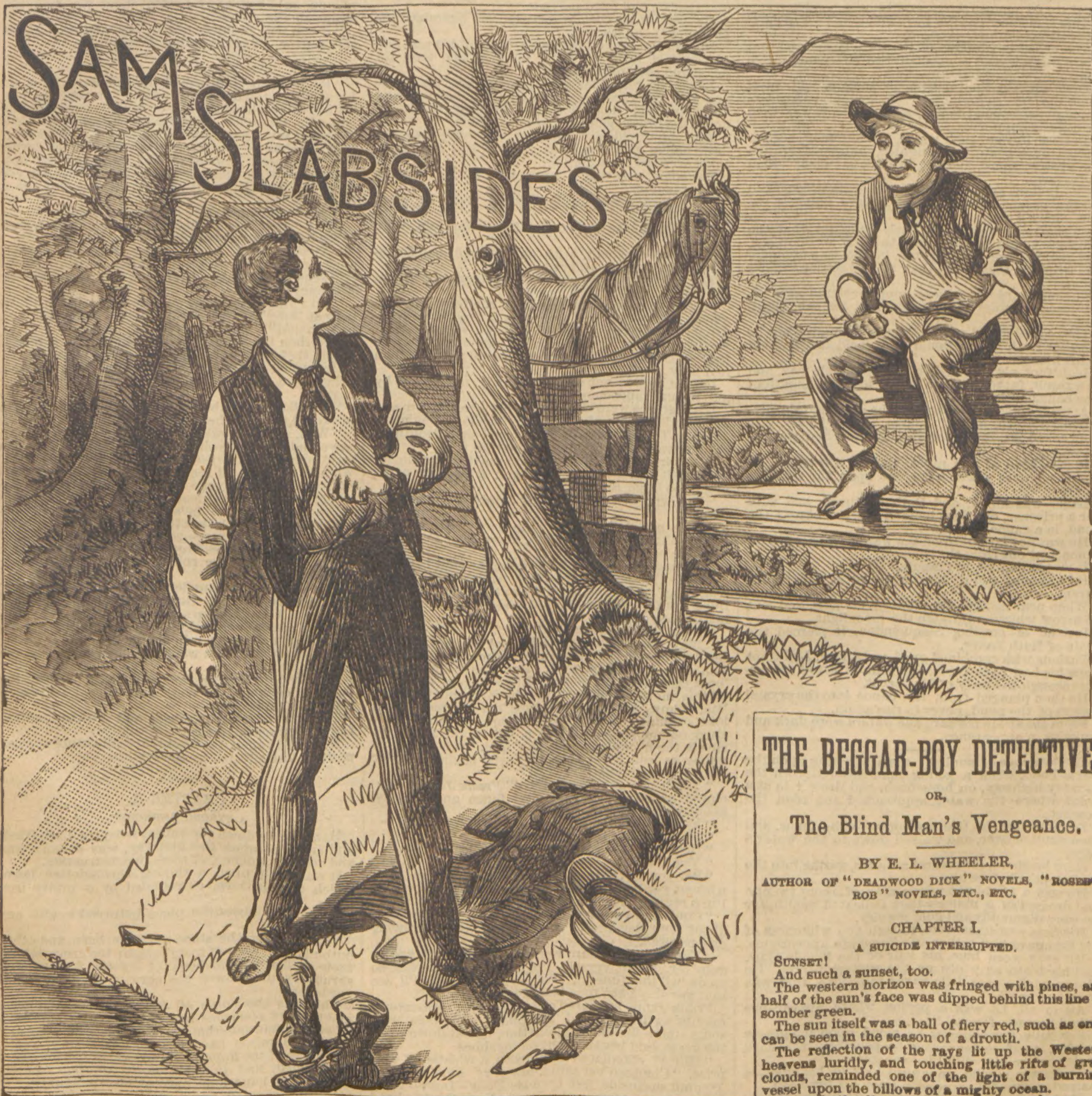
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"HABY A GO!" SAM REPLIED SAUCILY. "IF YOU'RE GOIN' TER DROWN YERSELF, I'M GOIN' TO SEE THE FUN, SO GO ON WI' THE FUNERAL."

THE BEGGAR-BOY DETECTIVE;

OR,

The Blind Man's Vengeance.

BY E. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD
ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A SUICIDE INTERRUPTED.

SUNSET!

And such a sunset, too.

The western horizon was fringed with pines, and half of the sun's face was dipped behind this line of somber green.

The sun itself was a ball of fiery red, such as only can be seen in the season of a drouth.

The reflection of the rays lit up the Western heavens luridly, and touching little rifts of gray clouds, reminded one of the light of a burning vessel upon the billows of a mighty ocean.

Beneath the light of the setting sun, lay one of the most beauteous valleys in the Blue Grass State, flanked by two pine-crowned ranges of hills.

The valley was many miles in length, fertile, and well populated. Agriculture was an art, almost, here, and everywhere were unmistakable evidences of thrift and prosperity.

Through the valley, in a zig-zag course, ran a highway, bordered with well-kept fence, and on either side of this thoroughfare, were large fields of ripening grain, tasseling corn, and billowy meadows; then, too, there were stately farm-houses—those famous New York State farm-houses, after which so many Southern homes take pattern, so white and neat, with their many wings and gables, porches and green blinds—and cottages, out-buildings, gigantic barns, granaries, and so forth.

But it is not of these we would write.

As the road wound in its serpentine course, through this smiling vale of Nature, it bordered a little lake, on its right, looking West—or, perhaps we should say, a pond, for the sheet of water did not cover more than a couple of hundred acres.

It was surrounded by sloping grassy banks, and but for one thing, was a remarkably pretty little lakelet.

It was the dark color of the water that gave it an ominous appearance.

The water was almost black, to look at, and yet it was not of a sluggish or stagnant nature, for the beach was hard and pebbly, and there were no water-weeds to be found anywhere along the shores.

Even the glinting rays of the departing sun did not serve to dispel the somber appearance of the water, as a brisk breeze pushed the tiny waves with a musical ripple against the emerald tinted border.

This was known as the Dark Pond, and for generations it had borne that name.

The oldest inhabitants of the locality averred that there was a legend connected with the pond, which ran something as follows:

Once upon a time a tribe of Indians had dwelt upon the eastern borders of the pond, and had subsisted chiefly upon the fish, with which it was then plentifully supplied.

In these days of their peace, a white man, accompanied by a beautiful daughter, had settled upon the western shore, and set to work to "clear" himself a farm.

The Indians and the pale-face became friends, and the braves lent a helping hand toward building the new-comer a cabin.

So charming was the settler's daughter, that the stalwart young braves grew to fairly worship her, and many were the presents, in the way of game, and trophies, that found their way to settler Baker's cabin.

The most ardent of these copper-colored enthusiasts, was old chief Sesquemonah, and his son, Lightfoot.

The old chief had no less than four squaws, but he felt that Ruth Baker would be a decided ornament to his home.

Lightfoot also loved her, in his humble way, and as a result, father and son quarreled, and Lightfoot was banished from the tribe.

After Lightfoot's departure, the old chieftain proposed to Ruth, and of course, was rejected. He then asked Mr. Baker for his daughter, and was refused.

In the dead of one night, shortly afterward, he and his braves made a descent upon the settler's cabin.

Baker was killed, and Ruth captured, and with her a prisoner, old Sesquemonah started across the pond, in a canoe.

He was not far out upon the water, when another canoe shot out from the shore.

It was Lightfoot, in pursuit.

Being young and strong, he gained rapidly on his parent.

When near enough, he manned his bow, and sent an arrow whizzing through the moonlight.

Instead of striking Sesquemonah, it pierced the brain of Ruth Baker.

Furious with combined grief and anger, Lightfoot drew his bow once more, and sent an arrow quivering through the body of his parent.

He then plunged from the canoe into the crystal waters of the pond, never to rise again.

From that time forward the waters were dark and ominous in appearance.

The last rays of sunlight were lingering upon the Dark Pond, when a young man dashed down the country highway, on horseback, and drew rein at a point where the water approached the road the nearest.

Dismounting, he tied his horse to the fence, and then vaulted over, and walked down to the water's edge.

Here he stood, for several minutes, gazing into the dark depths before him.

He was a trim-built young man of about twenty and dressed in a manner that indicated wealth, for he wore diamonds and gold jewelry.

His face was handsome, though the whiteness of his skin gave him rather an effeminate appearance.

His eyes were blue, his hair of the blonde type, and his teeth as white as the whitest pearls. He also sported a neat little flaxen mustache, that was most becoming.

All in all, he was a person whose appearance would impress favorably.

For fully five minutes he stood upon the grassy border, as if endeavoring to penetrate the dark water before him with his keen gaze.

There was a wild, unnatural look in his eyes,—a pained, sorrowful expression upon his forehead.

That he was troubled about something was plainly evident.

Not until the nearly last rays of sunlight had disappeared from the surface of Dark Pond did the

young man lift his gaze from the water and look toward the opposite side, where a pretty little cottage stood only a few feet from the water's edge.

"Ah! Dolly Denning, you know but little what fate you have driven me to!" he cried aloud, clenching his hand and raising it on high. "Oh! Dolly! Dolly! how could you be so cruel, when you knew how passionately and devotedly I loved you!"

Then he covered his eyes with his hands, and a tremor passed over him, caused by the intensity of his emotion.

"Oh! God, why was I ever born?" he went on on, "to suffer this torture—why, why was I ever born? I cannot live and see Dolly my own father's wife—not *no!* I'll carry out my original plan, that brought me here. I will put an end to my misery, and when Frank Jamison's lifeless body is found floating in Dark Pond—then, perhaps, Dolly will know how much I loved her."

"It is best I should do this. The Bible commands us not to commit murder, but I can't help that. I could not live and know that Dolly was father's wife—no, never! If I were to live, I would go crazy—I would kill them both, perhaps. Dead, I can harm no one, and they can live together, in peace and plenty, when I am forgotten."

"But, why stand here, like a driveling fool? I know what I've got to do, and I will do it. I am not afraid to die. I've led a good life, so far, and death has no terrors for me!"

It was evident that Frank Jamison had nerve, and that he had fixed purpose.

He took off his coat, resolutely, and examined the contents of the pockets.

He laid the coat on the grass, took off his vest and disposed of it in the same manner, and then sat down and took off his shoes.

Rising, he raised his eyes heavenward, where the sun still reflected myriads of colors; he uttered a silent prayer; then, with a firm step, he strode down the grassy slope toward the water.

That he would have plunged recklessly into the dark, sullen pond, seemed evident, had not something arrested his attention.

The something was a voice, that uttered the suggestive inquiry:

"Say, mister, where d'yer think you'll be, when yer get thar?"

The effect of the words upon Frank Jamison, were electrical.

He wheeled about, with an exclamation, somewhat vexed, and considerably scared.

The object that his gaze rested upon was truly a refreshing one, for that locality.

Seated upon the top board of the fence, near to where the horse was tied, was a boy of perhaps fifteen or sixteen years of age. In height he had nearly attained the average of manhood, but so thin and lank was he that he appeared taller than he really was.

In face he was not exactly homely, nor was he by any means handsome.

His features were clearly-cut, his eyes brown and keen, and his hair of a like color, while there lingered about the corners of his large-sized mouth an expression of humor and good-nature.

His attire consisted of but three articles, namely, an old felt hat, a calico shirt, and a pair of pants much too large for him.

"Ha! who are *you!*!" young Jamison sharply demanded.

"Who am I?" echoed the boy with a grin. "Why, I'm Samuel Slabsides, member of Congress. Who are *you?*"

"Nonsense! What are you doing around here?" "Oh! I'm jest takin' a rest, while the old man's restin', an' seein' you here, I tho't I'd see how the thing works, as I might want to try me hand at it, myself, one of these days."

"What do you mean *sir?*"

"Why susanside—susanside, o' course! Never see'd no one do thet act, an' et struck me as how et would be wu'th lookin' at. But, I say, mister, how 'bout them togs, an' shoes? Ef ye'r goin' to shuffle off this mortal coil yer won't have no more use fer 'em, nohow, an' yer might give 'em ter me. I'm a lone orphint, without any relashe, an' tho' I ain't stuck on me 'shape, I'll bet a billion I'd look jest ripe in them clothes. Ef ye'r goin' ter croak, ye might as well leave ther trowsers behind too, fer it's a pity ter break ther suit!"

"You'll not get the clothes!" Frank Jamison declared angrily. "Get off that fence and go along about your business, or I'll—"

"You'll what?"

"I'll give you a great thrashing!"

"Ho! ho! Will *you?*"

"Yes, I will!"

"Bet you on that! Bet I can skip all around you, without yer ketchin' me, jest like a lively flea. Oh! I'm a reg'lar daisy-bender, you bet!"

"Confound you, get off that fence, and go along about your business, I say!" Frank cried, growing exasperated.

"Nary a go!" Sam replied saucily. "If you're goin' ter drown yerself, I'm goin' to see the fun, so go on wif the funeral. Wade right in and I'll see that yer shoes an' togs is well taken care of."

Frank Jamison glared at his youthful tormentor a minute, as if he could annihilate him; then with some unintelligible exclamation, he sat down upon the grass, and began to put on his shoes.

"Hillo!" ejaculated Sam, with a whistle of surprise. "Changed yer mind, hev yer? Ain't goin' ter commit susanside jest because Dolly—Dolly—Dolly is goin' ter marry yer old man? Now, that's what I call good, every-day hoss sense. Ther idear of a feller kerfummigatin', jest 'cause a gal goes back on him, ain't 'cordin' ter scripiter, ner Queensbury!"

Jewhittaker! I bet Dolly would laff her socks off ef she knew 'bout what yer was goin' ter do!"

Frank Jamison finished putting on his shoes, arose, and donned his coat and vest.

"See here, boy!" he cried, turning on Sam Slabsides, half-fiercely. "I s'pose you'll go blab this matter to the first person you meet?"

"Dunno 'bout that, boss. Hain't much on the tattle, I ain't, but I would like ter tell Dolly, jest fer ter see her laff. I do jest like ter heer a gal laff. Et puts me in mind of an Irish bagpipe playin' the highland fling."

"If you ever mention a word of this to her I'll murder you!" Jamison declared, passionately.

"You would, hey? Now, Jamey, old stockin', you don't know me—that's pat. When yer try to skeer Sammy Slabsides out uv a year's growth, that's jest where yer make a mistake. I wasn't fetched up in Philamydelphy, ter be skeered by a coun' jack-lantern, nohow. I'm like er Zoological camil—ef ye rub me skin wif silk plush or a feather duster, I'm jest as docile as a lamb. I'll even stand bein' curried with a U. S. greenback. But when ye cum ter tryin' ter soothe me wif a sharp-toothed garden-rake, then ferbearance ceases ter be a virtue, and I kick!"

"Then, do I understand that for a money consideration, you will hold your tongue?"

"Nixee! Couldn't do that. My tongue and I alre solid pals, and I wouldn't hold 'im, fer nothin'. Ef you have got more money than yer don't know what ter do with, yer might slip me a couple o' milyun, an' I won't say nothin' 'bout yer 'temptin' susanside tho'."

"If you will promise not to say anything about this matter, I'll give you ten dollars."

"Ten?"

"Yes."

"Phew! But, you're a liberal snoozer! Now, do I resemble a ten dollar cigar-store Pompey? Do you see anything about the cut of my fib that reminds you of a ten-dollar clothing store dummy? Do I look as if ten dollars and I had allus bin strangers? Waal, mebbe I do. Hard times and adversity levels ther mightiest, Felix sez. But, howsumever, notwithstanding, ye make er colossal mistake when yer think I'd deprive myself uv red-ripe fun, jest fer a ten-dollar note!"

"Confound it, what do you want, then?"

"The earth, and a thousan' shares o' preferred stock in the atmosphere!"

"You'll get it, too!" young Jamison gritted, springing over the fence. "I'll ride down to R—, and send a constable after you, to arrest you for vagrancy."

"All right. When he comes for me tell him I'll be over at Dolly's! Oh! Dolly! Dolly! how could you be so cruel?"

And then the young vagabond burst into a merry laugh, that fairly infuriated the would-be suicide.

He untied and mounted his horse, with nervous agility, and spurred away down the road, in mad haste.

While Sammy Slabsides gazed after him, his lips puckered up, as if he wanted to whistle.

"Well, I'll be hugged ef that feller ain't as cranky as ye find 'em," he soliloquized. "He must hev the love complaint *fearful*, or else he's off his base. Wonder ef he would really hev tried to drown himself, ef I hadn't come along? Kinder reckon he would, fer he 'peared dead in earnest. An' his name is Frank Jamison, an' he's in love wif Dolly, an' so's his old man, an' it 'pears the old man is rather gettin' the best o' the race—scoopin' the sweepstakes!"

Here the boy glanced toward the west, where dark banks of clouds were rolling up, and then sprung down from the fence.

"Goin' to be a thunder-storm," he commented, "and a hard one too. Guess I better go rouse old Felix, an' he lookin' up some place fer shelter. The old man ain't so strong as when we started out on the tramp, an' et won't do him no good ter get wet. Phew, but a good rain would do heaps of good ter my complexion!"

And many a farmer, that evening, looked at the banks of clouds in the West, and echoed his words less the complexion.

The ground was parched, and vegetation was fairly burning up, for want of rain.

None had fallen, for weeks, and all nature seemed more or less affected by the drouth.

CHAPTER II.

A STRONG ASSERTION.

HALF a mile down the valley, from the Dark Pond, and fronting upon the highway, was a handsome and costly residence, of modern construction.

It was built upon a sloping shrub-dotted lawn, which was, in turn, surrounded by a pretty iron fence.

Everything about the place betrayed wealth and superior taste.

The dwelling, the stone carriage barn and other outbuildings, were of tasty design; the grounds with their walks, drives, beds of exotic flowers, and shrubbery, all showed the care of an experienced gardener.

This was the home of Judge Lennox Jamison, and the new residence had only recently superseded an old mansion, that had occupied the site.

Judge Jamison had been for a number of years, the judge of the Supreme Court of the circuit where he resided, and in addition to owning "Larchmont," his handsome and extensive country estate, was reputed to be worth somewhere in the neighborhood of half a million of money.

He was a widower, having only one child, an attractive girl, now nearing her majority.

His home, however, was also the home of two adopted sons, who answered to the names of Frank and Ralph Jamison.

They were twin brothers, and had been adopted by the late Mrs. Jamison, when they were infants, at which time their parents had been killed by a railroad accident.

Judge Jamison had not always been rich. Indeed, it was only within the latter few years that he had amassed his wealth, cleared off the taxes and mortgages on his estate, and built the sumptuous home he now occupied.

That he had acquired his wealth through being a judge of the Supreme Court was not probable, for the salary was not large; hence it was a matter of conjecture how he got his money, in so brief a time.

Some averred that he gambled in stocks; but, if so, he did it in such a quiet manner that no one at home could prove anything of the sort.

Mrs. Jamison had died fifteen years before, and shortly after her decease, Jamison had placed the children at school, and gone West.

He was absent about a year, and when he returned he was said to be as poor as when he went away.

Somehow, he had managed to get into politics, however, had studied law, and finally made rapid strides, until he became judge.

It was not until long after this, that prosperity seemed to smile on him.

About three hours before the meeting of Frank Jamison and the young tramp, Sam Slabsides, upon the shore of Dark Pond, Judge Jamison sat by a window, in his elegantly furnished parlor, looking out upon the lawn.

He was a large, massively built man, of imposing and stately appearance. His head, a trifle bald, was well developed, and his face full and round, with large gray eyes, whose natural expression was rather cold and stern.

His hair was frosted with white, and his well-trimmed mustache was the same.

His dress was suggestive of quiet but particular taste, and he wore a costly diamond ring and pin.

There was a look of displeasure upon his face, as he gazed from the window, upon the lawn.

"It is too aggravating to bear with any longer!" he said, aloud, "and we may as well come to an understanding, at once. I have formed my resolution, and it shall not be broken."

He touched a call-bell, near at hand, and a few minutes later, a negro boy, in livery, entered the room.

"Julius, is Master Frank about the house?" the judge asked, without diverting his attention from the lawn.

"Yes, sah. He is out at the stable, sah."

"Go tell him, then, that I want him. Where is Ralph?"

"Gone to the city, sah!"

"Ah! Julius, did he come in late last night?"

"After two, sah."

"Had he been drinking?"

"Deed, I don't know, sah. I didn't smell him breathe!"

"That will do. Go tell Frank to come here."

The servant nodded, and took his departure.

In the course of five minutes Frank Jamison entered the room.

"Did you want me, sir?" he inquired, pausing near the judge, hat in hand.

"Yes, I want you," was the reply. "I have heard that you were at Ivy Cottage again last night?"

"Yes, sir, I was!" Frank assented, flushing slightly.

"Ah! then the report was true. I believe it was less than a week ago, Frank, that I hinted to you that you could please me best, by keeping away from Ivy Cottage—was it not?"

"I believe you did hint something of the sort, sir."

"And yet, knowing this, you went there in opposition to my wishes."

Frank's cheeks flushed still rosier, and his eyes sparkled with spirit.

"I have always been an obedient son, I believe," he said; "even more so than Ralph. But, now I have arrived at an age, when I consider it a matter within my own jurisdiction, where I go, and with whom I associate."

"Indeed! You are carrying your ideas quite too high, sir. You will remember you are not twenty-one yet!"

"But I am so near to it, that there's no fun in it!"

"That matters not. I as good as ordered you to keep away from Ivy Cottage, and you should have heeded me. You are aware that I have been paying my addresses to Miss Denning, with a view of bringing her to Larchmont."

"And you are aware, sir, that Dolly and I have courted for the last two years!"

"Bah! bosh! you, a mere chit of a boy! Why, sir, marriage should be the last of your ambitions. What in the world have you got toward supporting a wife?"

"A stout heart, a willing mind, and a strong pair of arms, sir."

"Nonsense! You'd make a fine husband, to drag a pretty girl down to a life bordering on pauperism. For, of course, you could not expect me to countenance your marriage, no matter who you might marry."

"Nor should I as you, sir. I am thankful for all you have ever done for me, but you will please bear in mind, that, since I was fifteen, I have never asked you for a cent—not one! What money, clothing and trinkets I have had, have always been tendered me, without my asking."

The judge winced, for he knew this to be the truth.

Unlike his brother, Frank had grown up rather independent.

Rather than ask for anything he needed, he would go without it.

"Oh! well, that's altogether a different matter!" the judge said, off-handedly. "No doubt you like Dolly, as she is a very charming young girl, but you see this thing of your visiting Ivy Cottage when she is really not at liberty to entertain you, is neither right nor honorable in you."

"Why hasn't she a right to entertain me?" Frank demanded, hotly. "I am always welcome when I go there!"

"In a formal way, however. Dolly is a very considerate girl, and she feels compelled to act friendly toward you, from the fact that you have grown up together. That your visits to Ivy Cottage should cease, however, you must know, when I tell you, sir, that Dolly Denning has promised to become my wife within the month!"

"What!"

The announcement appeared to daze young Jamison.

"Just as I say," the elder went on, with a spice of triumph in his tone. "She already has the engagement-ring in her possession. So you see that all hopes of your winning her are futile, and you might as well take matters coolly and sensibly."

Frank made no reply.

He stood staring vacantly at the floor, powerless to express the feeling that rose within him.

"You know, Frank," Judge Jamison continued, "that I have always planned that you and Jessie should marry. Of course—"

"Enough!" Frank cried with sudden force. "Jessie and I are practically sister and brother, and could never marry. Dolly Denning loves me, and I love her. What power you have exercised to compel her to marry you, I know not; but I do know that she shall never become your wife, sir, if I have to kill her at the altar, and then kill myself!"

And, with these words, the adopted son turned and left the parlor, leaving the judge in what might safely be termed, an unenviable frame of mind.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MANSION.

THE highway ran along the shore of Dark Pond, until it reached its southern extremity, whence it continued on in an irregular course through the fertile and populous valley, where were located many happy and picturesque homes.

At the southern extremity of the pond the road ran around the base of a bluff of considerable magnitude, that rose precipitously on all of its sides, and covered an area of about two acres.

It was a singular landmark, rising as it did from an almost level valley-bottom, and what by no means detracted from its novelty was the fact that there was located on top of it, fully thirty feet above the level of the pond or highway, a large, square, barn-like house.

It was evidently an "old timer," for the paint had long since become worn off by the attacks of the elements, and there was scarcely a whole pane of glass to be seen in the numerous windows, and several of the shutters hung by one hinge.

That the place was untenanted appeared evident.

After leaving the scene of his interview with Frank Jamison, Sam Slabsides, the young tramp, trudged along the dusty road until he came to the base of the bluff.

Here, seated by the roadside upon a plot of grass, was an old, gray-haired man.

If appearances went to indicate anything, he had long since turned the shady side of sixty, for his once tall and stately figure was painfully bent, and he trembled as if his nerves were entirely shattered.

His beard, like his hair, was long, white, and matted, and covered the greater portion of his face.

His eyes he kept tightly closed, from which fact it became apparent that he was blind.

His nose, however, and his clothing was about as ragged and scanty as that of young Slabsides.

Agonized staff upon the ground beside him indicated that he was too weak to travel without some artificial support.

His face had been resting in his hands, but as Sam came up he slightly raised his head.

"Is that you, my son?" he inquired.

"Yes, Felix, it's me, of course. Been awake long?"

"Not very long, Sammy. I was dozing, when some one rode by on horseback, and awakened me."

"Yes, that war ther covey as wer' goin' ter commit susancide back here a piece."

"Ha! what say you?"

"I sed it wer' the feller what wer' goin' ter kermit susancide back heer on the lake-shore, only I skeert him out o' it, by lettin' on I wanted ter see how the racket worked. Jest like sum chumps—jest 'cause a feller wants ter pick up p'inters about scientific matters, they change color an' play mulish!"

"Who was going to commit suicide, Sammy?"

"Oh! a gailus-lookin' young chap what calls hisself Frank Jamison. You see, he fell in love with sum gal, an' the gal gives Frank the mitten, an' goes in fer Frank's old man, who I 'spect alre a bigger bug than Frank is. An' so, Frank gits jealous, an' makes up his mind ter put an end to hisself by an eternal soak in the pond. When he found I was sizin' up his racket, tho', an' calculatin' how near his shoes and cast-off garments would fit me, he got his mad up, mounted his horse and rid off, like he was chased by a band o' Injines."

"Strange that a young man should seek to take his own life!" old Felix said, slowly. "That is a

grievous sin before God. Even I, sinned against as I have been, and for years suffering the tortures of the damned, would scorn to make an attempt on my life."

"Yas, but you ain't everybody, Felix. Some fellers gits the love complaint so bad, that they're clean gone off their base. But come! We can't stay here chinnin', fer there's goin' to be a rain-storm, an' we wanter be findin' shelter. Ye know yer instytution are so frail that, if you wer' ter git a soakin', yer might kick the bucket."

"No, no! There is no fear of my dying yet—none whatever. I cannot die until I have obtained my revenge—I cannot die until I have obtained my revenge!"

"Oh! well, we'll jest let the revenge take keer of itself for the present, while we look out for shelter."

"So be it, my boy—it shall be as you say. But the hour of my revenge is not far off. Something tells me that I am nearing the end of my journey, and that the hour to strike is not far off. But, lead on, my boy. You have stuck by old Felix Jacobs like an own son, and your reward shall come when you least expect it."

"There, now, give 's a rest on that, Felix! You know you haven't got anything to leave behind when your claim here below peters out: so what's the good o' yer makin' promises?"

"Why, yer ain't even got er clean shirt to git planted in, an' ef beggin' don't pan out no better in the next few days than it has in the past, we won't have enuff money ter rent a spade ter dig a grave fer ye."

"Never mind—never mind!" the old man mumbled, as he got on his feet. "You've been a good boy to me, and you sha'n't go unrewarded."

"You'll have to be pittin' rich purty soon, then, that's my say!" Sam declared. "For I'll bet you can't make a showin' of enough cash ter b'y a meal fer a mouse. So I ain't goin' ter take no stock in inheritin' yer imaginary riches. That ain't wot I shook the dust o' Philymedephia off me gaiters fer—nixeel! I allus make et a point ter summer in the rural deestricks, like all the high-toned Congressmen, an' that was my ideer afere I run across you."

"But you won't leave me, Sammy—you won't leave me, until I reach my journey's end?" the old man tremulously demanded.

"Waal, that depends suthin' how fer off that end may be," the boy replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "When ther snow begins ter gather under foot, I reckon I'll be makin' tracks toward the city, where a feller kin keep warm on the lunch-route, besides turnin' in an occasional dime at shinin' shoes. But, et will be some time afore winter!"

"Ay, ay! so it will, and ere that time arrives my mission will be accomplished."

"Good gracious! I hope so. But, come! there's a house up this bluff, and by the looks, I don't reckon any one lives in it. If not, it will make a daisy place to spend the night." And grasping old Felix by the arm, Sam assisted him to climb up a rugged sort of path that ascended one side of the curious hill.

The clouds had now overcast all of the Western horizon, and it was rapidly getting dark.

The thunder rumbled more noisily along the horizon, and zig-zag streaks of lightning began to play across the face of the clouds.

When they arrived at the top of the hill, Sam found that his surmise about the old house was correct.

It was untenanted, and probably had been so for several months, if not longer; for the grounds were grown up waist high with rank weeds, and the front double-doors stood wide open.

A piazza ran entirely around the house, which, Sam judged, must contain a great number of rooms.

At that hour, and with the storm and darkness coming rapidly on, the place had a desolate and uncanny appearance, to say the least, and the young tramp surveyed it with a speculative whistle.

"Looks like it might be a reg'lar old ghost-roost," he silently commented. "Wonder why no one don't live here! Et would make a hossy old place, wi' a little fixin'."

When they reached the house, Sam bade old Felix be seated on the piazza, while he made a reconnaissance.

And while he enters the house, let us refer more particularly to old Jacob.

He claimed, that several years before, he had been attacked by highwaymen in the West, which he was leaving at the time, the bearer of a fortune accumulated by mining. After robbing him, the chief of the highwaymen had, in revenge for Jacob's having killed two of his men, touched the pupils of Jacob's eyes with vitriol, and left him blind and helpless in the mountain wilds.

After months of suffering and wandering, he managed to reach his home in Connecticut, which he had left twelve years before to go to the mines.

At that time, he had left behind him a family consisting of a wife, a maiden sister, and two children, these latter a girl of seven, and another aged four years.

As his family kept a little store, from which they derived a comfortable living, he did not send any money home at all until the fifth year, as his wife wrote that it was not necessary.

At the end of the fifth year, he sent home a sum of ten thousand dollars, and had it deposited to his credit in the home bank, the deposit being made by his wife to his credit.

Not long after this, he received the intelligence that his entire family had been swept away by typhoid fever, and buried in the family cemetery, his informant being his only direct relative, a second cousin, named Milo Mitchell.

Shocked beyond expression, Jacob had sent on a

liberal check to Mitchell on the home bank, ordering him to erect tombstones for the dead, and as the balance of his money was safe at interest, to allow it to so remain.

As the gold excitement was waxing hot at this time, and having no ties to take him back East, Jacobi resolved to remain in the mines indefinitely, and did so.

At length, at the end of twelve years' absence, all told, having amassed another fortune of twenty thousand dollars, he drew it from his western bank and set out on horseback for the nearest railroad station, eastward bound.

It was while thus en route, that he was attacked by the highwaymen, and subjected to the terrible indignity that lost him his sight and his fortune as well.

A tale full as strange as that awful experience that had befallen himself, awaited his home-coming.

He learned that neither his wife nor any of the family had died at the time such news had been sent him, but that Milo Mitchell, by altering the check sent him, had drawn all of Jacobi's money from the bank, and, accompanied by Mrs. Jacobi and her youngest daughter, had fled to parts unknown.

Report had it that, not many months afterward, Mrs. Jacobi and her daughter had been seen with a strolling band of Gypsies. That was the last ever seen and heard of her, while nothing was known of Mitchell's whereabouts.

Nancy, Jacobi's maiden sister, had also disappeared from the home, taking with her the elder daughter of the unfortunate miner, whom Mrs. Jacobi had left behind.

Such was the story the blind beggar had told Sam Slabsides.

He also averred, that he had had a revelation in a dream, that it was really Milo Mitchell who led the highwaymen in the western outrage, and who had put out his sight and that, if he kept on wandering about the country, he would eventually find his man, and the opportunity to visit vengeance upon him would be afforded.

But, as yet, that opportunity had not come, and it did not look probable that old Felix would live long enough to hunt down the scoundrel who had done him such hideous wrong.

When Sam Slabsides entered the spacious hall of the old mansion, he was surprised to find that it was carpeted!

To be sure, the carpet was old, dusty, moldy, in places, and scattered over with leaves that had drifted in at the open door; but it was a carpet, all the same, and extended up the broad staircase.

This surprise, however, only partly paved the way for others that were to follow.

Turning off from the hall, he entered the parlor. Here, an excitation burst from his lips.

Although dust and dirt were conspicuous everywhere, the parlor was grandly furnished with ancient, but elegant furniture, pictures, rich curtains, and ornaments, and a splendid velvet carpet of light color covered the floor.

It appeared that whoever had formerly occupied the house had decamped, leaving nothing behind.

Although the light was somewhat dusky in the room, Sam was able to discern all this, and also saw two things, not usually included in parlor furnishings.

Pending downward, half-way from the ceiling, to which it was attached with a screw-hook, was a rope, the lower part being formed in the shape of a slipping noose.

Directly under this there was a large, dark-red stain upon the carpet, which had been caused, without a doubt, by bloodshed.

Attached to the rope was also a card; upon it was traced, in bloody letters, the following:

"John Van Gelder,
Here. Took His Own Life.
Beware. And Keep Away From This
Haunted House.
I Am Present, Even In Death.
JOHN VAN GELDER."

"Oh! ye are, hey?" Sam soliloquized, on reading the card.

"If THAT'S the case, I reckon that's why people don't hang their hats up, an' stay awhile around here. Dunno, tho', 'bout ghost bizness. I never took much stock in such things. Maybe it's 'cause I never see'd one. Hello—Jupiter!"

Little wonder he uttered this sudden exclamation, for some invisible hand, or something that felt like a hand, had slapped him a stinging blow upon the cheek!

He wheeled completely around, but could not see a sign of human presence.

Who had struck him?
Or, what had struck him?

This was a puzzling question, which Sam had no means of answering.

He had been standing in the center of the room, at the time of receiving the blow, with his back turned to the door, but it was impossible that a man could have dodged out the door without being detected. And yet there was no other source of escape for the person who had dealt the blow.

"Well, I'm darned ef that ain't funny," Sam ejaculated, staring helplessly around, and at the same time feeling of his cheek. "I'd jest like to get a squirt at the snoozer that lammed me. Say, hello! Where are yer, ye sneak? Come out beer, till I size yer up, an' squirt terbaccy juice in yer eye!"

No answer to this challenge.

"Kinder looks as if et were a ghost, or something funny," Sam muttered; "but if there's any humans in here I'm g' in' to know it."

With this resolve he left the parlor, to make an in-

vestigation of the other apartments of the strange old mansion.

It was growing darker and darker, and he knew he could not make a tour of all the rooms, before it would be too dark to see anything; so he hurried his movements through the lower apartments, and found that they were empty, not one of them except the parlor before described containing any furniture whatever.

So Sam was about returning through the dark hall, to the front of the house, when he felt a rush of air before him, as though some one had hastily crossed his path.

He made a sudden bound forward, and his outstretched hands touched a garment which he concluded was a woman's dress.

Another bound brought him still nearer, and his hand grasped a small shoulder, and brought the owner to a halt.

At the same instant there was a tremendous crash of thunder, a vivid flash of lightning, and a wild, blood-curdling shriek, that fairly made Sam Slabsides's hair stand up on end.

While the lightning flash revealed to him that the person whose shoulder he grasped was a young and beautiful maiden!

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK AND RALPH.

We have said that Ivy Cottage was across the Dark Pond, from the point where Frank Jamison attempted suicide, and that the old deserted mansion loomed up on the bluff, at the southern extremity; that the road kept around the base of the bluff, and wound on in a zig-zag course, down the valley.

Branching off this highway, half a mile from the bluff, was a wide lane, which ran up the shore of the pond, until it reached Ivy Cottage, where it widened, and surrounded the dwelling where half a hundred stately maple trees bordered either side of the lane, rendering cool and complete shade, in the sunniest weather.

This lane was not a public thoroughfare, but belonged with the property on the west, to the Ivy Cottage farm, which comprised about a hundred acres of very fertile land.

The shade of the lane, however, was so tempting that strolling bands of Gypsies frequently camped therein, for a day or two, during which time they attracted numerous visitors from the village of R—, a mile below—romantic young folk, mainly, who came to have their fortunes told by Gypsy queen; or, now and then, a horse-jockey, who came to get up a "swap."

These Gypsies were generally a well-behaved lot of wandering traders and tinkers, whose usurpation of the maple lane was never particularly objected to, by Miss Priscilla Tanglefoot, the ancient maiden lady who owned Ivy Cottage, and the lands attached.

Priscilla could usually make an honest penny, by selling milk and other little luxuries to the nomads, and if there was one thing above another that Priscilla liked to do, it was to capture that honest penny, and hoard it away for a rainy day.

Next to her money, she probably doted upon her niece, Miss Dolly Denning, who was not only the belle and the beauty of that section of the country, but was Priscilla's prospective heir.

This fact alone, was enough to draw her plenty of suitors, let alone her beauty, educational accomplishments, and charming manners; for, besides owning Ivy farm, clear, Priscilla was believed to have quite a number of thousand dollars stowed away.

She had bought Ivy Cottage farm, a number of years before our story opens, and by judicious management, had got every cent out of it that was obtainable, without running it down.

Ivy Cottage was a pretty structure of modern design and conveniences, and its porticos were overrun with flowering ivy and climbing roses, while white beds of flowers lent an additional charm to the place.

The day that ushers in our story found a Gypsy camp of considerable magnitude located in Maple Lane, for not only did the tribe have a score of good wagons, but their horses were of fine stock, and in excellent condition, and the nomads themselves were better dressed and more intelligent-appearing than the general run of their race.

There were twenty families, averaging four to a family, with the female sex slightly predominating.

The afternoon of the day of their encampment brought a merry crowd of young people down to Maple Lane, from R—, and as she knew many of them, Miss Dolly Denning joined the gathering in a stroll through the camp.

She was a decided blonde, of attractive form, charming of face, and tasty of dress, and wherever she went, she attracted attention and admiration.

It was so at the Gypsy camp.

There were several stalwart and dusky handsome young fellows among the band, who had a keen eye for beauty, and they took occasion to stare at Miss Denning in a way that was not pleasant to her.

So, seeing Mr. Ralph Jamison present, she accepted of his offered protection, and he returned scowls for the admiring stares of the Gypsies.

Ralph Jamison, in personal appearance and dress, was an exact counterpart of his brother, Frank, and not two out of every ten persons who saw them could tell them apart, so alike were they.

It was by their difference in temperaments that they were distinguishable, for, while Frank was habitually mild and retiring in his habits, Ralph was of a somewhat wilder nature, and more inclined to be reckless and jolly.

As he drank some, and Frank was a total abstain-

er, some of the farmers had been known to say that "they could pick out Ralph by smelling his breath, if in no other way."

Ralph Jamison had another peculiarity; though much sought after by the ladies, he was practically not so much of a lady's man as his brother, and seemed to prefer the companionship of his gun to that of any one of the many pretty girls who would have been delighted with his society.

He had often said he would not marry the best girl in existence, and the belief prevails that he meant what he said.

His lack of appreciation of the fair sex, however, did not prevent his being a polite and agreeable *chaperon* when occasion demanded it, and he did the escort for Dolly Denning about the camp in a way that made many of the fellows envy him.

"I suppose you have had your fortune told already?" he remarked, as they sauntered along.

"Oh! no, sir; I never had it told, as aunty says it is all nonsense."

"Ah! I see. That's because aunty has got a business eye after the everlasting penny," Ralph laughed.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Of course, aunty is close in some things, but she is liberal and kind in others."

"I think I could tell your fortune pretty well," Ralph chatted on. "You are soon to be married—that is, if *that* is any indication," and he pointed to a solitary ring upon her finger.

"That should not be construed as having any significance," she said, looking confused. "Why, who in the world should I marry?"

"Whom you should marry, and whom you will marry, are two different things. I suppose if you are hankering after love in a cottage, you should become Mrs. Frank Jamison, but I have understood that the prospects are more favorable for your becoming Mrs. Judge Jamison."

Dolly made no reply, although her face assumed a pained expression, and she soon adroitly changed the conversation to another subject.

During the afternoon she visited the tent of the Gypsy queen, in company with Ralph, to have her fortune told, nearly all her girl acquaintances having had their fortunes expounded.

The Gypsy queen proved to be quite an invisible person, for she was attired in a robe of somber black, and her face was obscured from view by a thick veil, through which two round holes were cut for the eyes, and a third one for her to speak through.

Her hands also were gloved in black kids, and, all considered, she might well be said to be a somber Dame of Fortune.

At her request Ralph Jamison retired from the tent.

What she then said to Dolly Denning he had no means of knowing, but when the girl came forth all the roses had left her cheek, and in their place was an unnatural pallor.

"Why, what is the matter, Miss Denning?" he quickly asked, stepping forward.

"Nothing!" she gasped. "Take me as far as the cottage, and, for heaven's sake, say nothing to aunt Priscilla that I visited the Gypsy queen."

"Of course not. But, tell me, as a friend, did she do or say anything to you that necessitates her chastisement? If so, by Heaven, for Frank's sake, I'll turn the whole Gypsy crew from this lane at the point of my revolver!"

"No! no! For my sake say nothing. Only I must go home. Ask me nothing, but take me home."

He took her arm, and they walked silently away toward Ivy Cottage.

Once or twice she shuddered on the way, and when they came near to the cottage she thanked and dismissed him, and entered the cottage grounds alone.

"Strange, what the Gypsy queen said to agitate her so," Ralph muttered. "I'd like to know, for I always fancied there was some secret connected with her life."

He turned to retrace his footsteps, and, as he did so, saw a man standing but a few steps away, his figure partly screened from view by the trunk of one of the huge maples.

He was a Gypsy, of commanding figure, and evidently of great muscular strength. His skin was as swarthy as a native Italian's, his face a coarse, evil-expressed one, with gleaming black eyes, a coarse, sensual mouth, with pearly teeth, and shaded by a fierce, black mustache. His hair, of a like hue, fell in waves over his shoulders.

He was, apparently, some thirty years of age, and was attired in rather fantastic Gypsy garb, and wore a broad-rim hat, pinned up at one side.

He was gazing after Dolly Denning's retreating form in a way that caused Ralph Jamison's blood to fairly boil in his veins.

"See here!" he cried, stepping quickly toward the Gypsy, whom he remembered as being one of those whose staring had annoyed Dolly at the camp, "who are you, and what do you want?"

The Gypsy folded his arms across his breast and surveyed his accoster.

"I am Gril Guyandotte," he announced, coolly.

"You are, eh? And what do you mean by dogging me and this young lady?"

"I haven't been dogging you."

"None of your lying! You were in your camp when we left."

"And took a notion to walk this way."

"Bah! Then why were you standing behind the tree?"

"That's none of your business, sir."

"Isn't it? I'll show you whether it isn't. You get back toward your camp or I'll send a bullet through you!"

And by a dextrous move Ralph Jamison whipped

a revolver out of his hip-pocket and leveled it at the dashing Gypsy.

Gril Guyandotte only smiled, disagreeably.

"Oh! put up your weapon!" he said. "I was about to turn back when you saw me."

"Then go! and see that you keep wide away from yonder cottage, if you value your personal safety." Guyandotte made no retort, but turned and walked leisurely toward the camp of his people.

Ralph Jamison followed, and passing on through the camp, continued on down the lane.

"I don't like the looks of that Guyandotte a bit!" he said as he strode along. "He has an evil eye in his head, and had a motive in seeing where Dolly went. I hardly think, however, he'd dare make an attempt to kidnap her. Such things used to happen in days gone by, but the law is too wide-awake in these times for such ruffian's work."

And so he dismissed all thoughts of the matter from his mind.

"It would, indeed, have been a bold attempt to make, and there was no probability of its being made."

Just before he reached the connection of the lane with the main highway, Ralph was surprised to see his brother step out from behind a tree.

There was a wild, unnatural gleam in Frank's eyes, and he was white with passion.

"Hold up!" he said, grimly, stepping out into the road. "So I caught you at it, did I?"

He uttered the interrogatory in a hoarse, unnatural tone, which caused Ralph to flush with surprise, for he and his brother had always been on good terms.

"Why, caught me at what, Frank?"

"In company with Dolly Denning!"

"Yes, I was in her company for a short time. She was afraid of some of the Gypsies, who stared insolently at her, and I offered her my protection."

"Indeed! You took her home, too?"

"Nearly so. Something the Gypsy queen said caused her great agitation, and she was weak and trembling, and asked me to see her home. I am sure there's no harm in that, Frank."

"I ain't so sure. I want it understood that no foster father, brother, nor any one else, shall stand between me and that girl."

"Pshaw! Frank, you're excited. You know I don't want her. I've enough to do to look after Ralph Jamison, without bothering my brains with a matrimonial incumbrance."

"All right, I hear. But I want you to hear also. The first man I catch talking to her *dies*! She has deceived me, but she shall never show favor to another. I have sworn to it. So beware!"

"And as he uttered the words, in a ringing tone, a man came driving into the lane in a handsome carriage, drawn by a span of high-stepping horses, and overheard the loudly spoken words, thereby causing a dark scowl to darken his brow—a scowl betokening no good to impetuous and jealous Frank Jamison."

The man, of course, was Judge Jamison. He was attired with scrupulous neatness and was going to Ivy Cottage to see Dolly Denning.

CHAPTER V.

FLOSS.

SAM SLABSIDES had hardly expected to see a *bona fide* spook, when he grasped hold of that which had hurried past him, in the darkness; hence, his surprise was great, when he beheld a girl of about his own size and age, in the illumination of the vivid lightning flash.

Nor was it this girl from whose lips had pealed the blood-curdling shriek.

That had appeared to come from out in the dense darkness of the night, where the rain was now pouring down in torrents.

"Hello, sis, who are *you*?" Sam demanded, keeping a firm gripe upon her shoulder. "None o' yer squirmen', now, fer ye can't git away, till yer give an account of yerself."

"Oh! please, sir, let me go. I'll scream for help if you don't!" was the reply.

"All right! Exercise yer bugle as much as yer like, fer all ther good et'll do yer. I ain't no pirut, so yer needn't be skeered. I'm jest a senator what dropped in heer out o' the rain, and as the ghosts hev bin raisin' hob around here, I'm in fer investigatin' matters. Did yer hit me a peg 'longside the jaw, a bit ago?"

"No, I didn't. Let me go!"

"Now, don't git in a hurry. Et is rainin' like Jupiter, an' yer don't wanten git wet. Jest be sociable-like, an' tell me who ye air, an' I won't hurt yer. My name is Samuel Slabsides, an' I'm what ther high-toners call a tramp. But, that's nothin'—I'm as good as they are. What's your name?"

"Floss!"

"Phew! yer don't say! That's a crackin' purty name. Knocks ther tariff all lopsided on Slabsides, don't it? Ef yer is as purty as yer name, you're a stunner, I'll bet. Ah! I have it!"

"What?"

"A match! I want a better look at you," and as he spoke, he struck the match on the wall, and produced a light that lasted long enough for the two to get a good look at each other.

The girl was about sixteen, trimly built, and quite pretty, having a brunette complexion, and dark hair flowing over her shoulders to her waist.

She wore a plain chintz dress, a jaunty straw hat, but no shoes or stockings.

To Sam Slabsides's eye, however, she was a veritable beauty, and he gave a prolonged whistle of surprise.

"Well! I'll be gobbled up by dog-ketchers, ef you ain't a reg'lar daisy!" he ejaculated. "What d'yer think o' me fer good looks?"

"I could tell better if your face was clean," was the prompt response.

"Shouldn't wonder a bit. I wears dirt on my face ter keep from gettin' tanned and freckled. Sure preventive fer sun-stroke, too. Live 'round these parts?"

"No."

"Ye don't? Where do yer live, then, and what aire ye doin' in this ghost-trap?"

"I belong with the Gypsy camp, below here. I came up here to sell some beads, and found no one at home. So I looked through the house, and it got dark so quick, I nearly lost my way."

"Ye don't say! An' ye'r a Gypsy gal?"

"Yes."

"Gosh, that's nice! D'ye know, I jest dote on Gypsies, I do! Come nigh joinin' 'em, last year, when I was on the tramp, jes 'cause I fell in luv wi' a gal 'bout yer size. She was the queen, tho', and high-toned as a owl on er telegraph pole, an' so, as I didn't know how ter steal hosses, the capting allowed I'd better mosey, an' I did. He wore an orful big boot, too. Say, how fur's yer camp?"

"About a mile distant—in the maple lane, below here."

"All right. Mebbe I'll drop down an' see yer, tomorrow. Wait. I'll get yer a chair."

"No! no! I must go."

"Nary a time, 'til it stops pourin'. I'll see yer part way hum, then. You'll wait, won't ye?"

"I—I—I'm afraid they will be alarmed at the camp."

"Nixee! They'll know you've sense enough to stay under shelter."

And so Sam darted into the parlor, snatched up a couple of chairs, and got out again, in double-quick order, considering the darkness.

"We'll go out on the veranda," he said. "My old side-pardner, Felix, is out there."

"Who?"

"Old Felix. He's a poor old beggar, that's travelin' 'round the hemisfeer wi' me—blind in one eye, and can't see out o' t'other. Come on, he won't hurt you."

The Gypsy girl seemed to have confidence in the young tramp, for she followed and was soon seated on the veranda of the lonely house.

Sam then began to grope about in quest of Felix.

"Hello! Where air yer, Felix?" he cried. "Bet a buttermilk bonbon he's fast asleep. Hey! Felix!" He called loudly but there was no answer.

"Drat it, I left him right here a few minutes ago. I don't believe he'd go away. I wish it would lightning!"

He got his wish a few seconds later, when there were several vivid and lengthy glares of heaven's pyrotechnics in rapid succession.

By this light Sam was able to see that old Felix was not on the front or either side piazza, nor anywhere to be seen in front of the house.

"Well, I'll be jiggered! Ain't that queer?" he said. "What d'ye suppose could have become of my old pal?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Floss replied. "I heard a shriek when you caught hold of me. Maybe some harm has befallen him."

"That wasn't his shout. He couldn't raise sech a squeal as that ef he was ter try. He's too old an' feeble. That was ther ghost as yelled."

"There are no such things as ghosts!"

"Ain't ther? Waal, now, that idea I've always carried, but I've found out different. There's a prescription put up in ther parlor as sez as how this house is ha'nted. Some feller committed susanside, an' I reckon got inter a hot climate an' is glad ter come back."

"I saw the notice, but there is no such a thing as a ghost. Perhaps your friend fell off the cliff."

"Mebbe. I'll go reconnoiter. Will you wait for me?"

"Yes."

"Sure, now?"

"Yes."

"All right. I won't be long."

Then Sam plunged away in the pouring rain. By the time he reached the verge of the cliff there was more lightning.

Thus he was enabled to see below.

But no trace of Felix was visible at that point, so Sam moved on through the pouring rain until he had made an entire circuit of the bluff-top.

But all in vain.

Felix plainly had not fallen over the side of the bluff.

Where was he, then?

Had he wandered into the house at some other point than the main entrance?

This seemed the only probable way of accounting for his singular disappearance.

Sam had not been in the house over fifteen minutes, at the most, so it would seem that Felix could not have got far away.

Sam went back to the piazza.

Floss was still there.

"Did you find him?" she asked.

"No—nary a trace of him."

"Very strange; what could have become of him?"

"I should smile. Did yer hear any more ghosts?"

"No."

Then he told her of the mysterious slap he had got in the parlor.

"Now, ef there ain't dead ghosts 'round here, ther's *live* ones," he said, "an' I'll bet on it."

"Live ones, more likely, though I was all through the house and didn't see any one."

"Well, I'm goin' to investigate. If Felix ain't in the place, somethin' 'sterious has happened to him."

"You're not going to venture into the house in the dark, are you?"

"Not if I can find anything to make a torch out of."

He once more went around to the rear of the house and made a search in the shed. As luck would have it, he found an old tin lantern which contained both oil and wick.

Returning to the piazza, he lit it, and was ready to set out on his tour of investigation.

"As it is raining hard yet, I will accompany you," Floss said.

"All right. Keep yer eyes peeled fer ghosts, and if we kin run one down, we'll have a ghost barbecue!"

They then entered the mansion.

Their first investigation was through the parlor, where Sam had got the mysterious slap in the face, but nothing new was discovered.

The room presented the same appearance as before, except that the two chairs were gone.

The other rooms of the first floor were next searched, and the plucky couple even ventured down into the cellar.

Here they found a multitude of bottles, barrels and champagne baskets, which seemed to indicate that the previous owner of the place had been a bibulous individual.

Among a lot of rubbish, Sam picked up a letter.

The envelope was addressed:

"Lennox H. Jamison, R—, Ky."

Sam thrust it carelessly into his pocket, and they went up-stairs.

Their next venture was into the second story, where they visited room after room, examined closets, and every cubby-hole that could contain a person.

"What are you going to do, if you fail to find your friend?" Floss asked, as they pursued their search.

"Dunno! Give it up!" was the reply. "There's somethin' mighty mysterious about et, or I'll be mistook fer the President. Ef I can't find no trace of Felix, he's been tuk prisoner, an' hain't fur from this immeget neighborhood, an' I'll bet the eysters on et. Anyhow, I don't leave these parts till I find out what's become o' Felix."

He spoke energetically, and as he was the very sort of a lad who once he had said a thing would stick to it, it looked favorable for Felix yet being found.

They next began to explore the third story, but the result was similar to that which had greeted them elsewhere.

There was no one in the house, so far as they could find out, nor were there any signs of any one having recently been there.

"This 'ere mystery takes the bunion!" Sam commented, as they made their way down-stairs. "It looks as if the earth hed opened an' swallowed Felix. Ef it did, et must 'a' bin hard-up fer suthin' to eat, fer ther weren't enuff meat on his bones ter satisfy an ordinary Jersey muskeeter."

"I am also singularly impressed by his strange disappearance," Floss said. "Some mystery *does* seem to hang over this old house. Perhaps in the morning you will find Felix at some neighboring farm-house."

"Hope so, but don't half expect to!" Sam said, grimly. "I reckon mebbe the spooks collared onto him jest because he was gettin' old and helpless."

By this time they had got down-stairs, and they went out on the piazza once more.

As he did so, Sam pointed to where he had previously placed and left the parlor chairs, at the same time uttering the startled ejaculation:

"The chairs are gone!"

And it was true; the two chairs had been removed from the piazza!

Floss turned pale, and Sam's eyes were literally as big as saucers.

"Worse, and more of it, by jingo!" he gasped. "There's no use of chinnin'! The old rat-trap is haunted!"

The rain had ceased to fall, the lightning to flash, and the thunder to reverberate.

Darkness reigned deep and intense.

"I'm going!" Floss said, with a shiver. "This place is no place for me."

"W it a minute, and I'll go part way with you!" Sam exclaimed.

He darted into the hall, and flashed his light into the parlor.

It took but a glance for him to discern that the chairs had been replaced in the original positions from which he had taken them.

This was enough!

He returned to the piazza.

"We'll get out of this!" he said. "I'll postjourn my investigation till to-morrow. Then, ef I don't do some big figgerin', my name ain't Sam Slabsides, nohow!"

"If I can steal away maybe I'll come and help you," Floss said.

Then they left the piazza, and advanced toward the edge of the bluff.

As they did so, there issued from the house a series of wild and blood-curdling shrieks, that were so awful that they caused the two to quicken their footsteps, while their hair literally had a tendency to rise on end.

"Oh! squeal away!" Sam muttered. "Ef I don't find out who's doin' that catwaulin', ye can call me a slabsided N. G. chump from Weehawken!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE JUDGE GOES CALLING.

JUDGE JAMISON was seen by Frank and Ralph, almost as soon as he saw them, but he drove straight

along, and passed them, nodding to Ralph, but paying no attention whatever to Frank.

When he had driven on, Frank Jamison shook his clinched fist after him.

"Go on, foolish man, if you think you are well off!" he hissed, savagely. "It's little I owe you—or you either, Ralph, for you know that uncle John Van Gelder was supposed to have left money behind, to be applied to our benefit."

"I know there was such a story, Frank, but I guess it was all nonsense, for it never could be proved that uncle John owned a cent in the world, beyond the old house on the bluff, at the time of his suicide."

"Because, it was Lennox Jamison who discovered and cut down the body, and if anything was left behind, it is probable he took care of it, and destroyed all papers."

"You should not talk this way, Frank. It is not just, or right."

"Oh! well, have your own way, if you like—it matters not to me, nor does it change my opinion, a particle. All you need do is to see that you keep clear of Ivy Cottage."

"Don't fear, Frank. I shall not bother your *inamorta*; but for God's sake, and your brother's sake, do not stoop to do anything rash, or criminal."

"Don't lecture me. I'll do as I please about that!" Frank declared, independently, and turning, he walked swiftly away toward home.

Ralph followed, thoughtfully, and at a much slower gait.

In the mean time, the judge drove on, toward Ivy Cottage.

The grim expression of his countenance lifted somewhat, as he held his prancing steeds from trotting, but the light of his cold gray eyes was none the less stern and intense—eyes that were furtive in their glance, and suggested that there were few if any ennobling passions in his heart.

He was an imposing-looking person, however, and as he drove through the Gypsy camp, he and his equipage attracted much attention.

Among others who saw him, without being seen, was a man who stood partly in the shadow of one of the wagons.

He gave a low whistle of surprise, and his teeth went together with a click.

Judge Jamison drove on, to Ivy Cottage, without knowledge of this fact, however.

Arrived at the cottage, he got out of the carriage and tied his horses; then walked up the graveled path to the vine and rose embowered porch, where Miss Priscilla Tanglefoot was seated, in her clean calico wrapper, picking over some raspberries, for tea.

Miss Priscilla was a typical old maid.

Forty odd years had passed over her head—if, indeed, not fifty, odd—and left her a tall, angular woman, with a spare amount of flesh, and a thin, vinegary visage, with prominent high cheek-bones, a pointed chin, and iron gray hair.

"Good-evening, Priscilla," Judge Jamison saluted, seating himself on the lower step. "This has been a scorching hot day!"

"Yes, but we have not minded it so much, here, judge—we have so much shade."

"Yes, indeed. You made a wise choice in making this your home. I see you have another Gypsy band, down the lane! Why do you allow so many of those vagabonds to camp there, Priscilla?"

"Well, you see, judge, the lane never gets turned to any real account, otherwise; and, I'll tell you, I make quite a few pennies off the Gypsies, by selling them farm products. They generally have money, and pay for what they get. And every penny counts, nowadays, judge—every penny counts."

"Yes, I suppose it does. But, what's all these pennies going to benefit you, if you never enjoy them?"

"Oh! well, Dolly will have them, you know. Everything will go to Dolly."

"By the way, where is my fair Dolly, now?"

"Dear me! she's up-stairs, lying down with sick headache, judge. She would persist in going to see the Gypsies, and I expect it overcame her."

The judge slightly frowned.

"I don't care about having her running about these encampments!" he said. "There is nothing beneficial to be learned at them. Has Frank been here within the past three or four hours?"

"No."

"It is well. Do you think she saw him at the camp?"

"I am quite sure she didn't. She always tells me, when she sees him. Then, too, she is never down-spirited, after meeting him."

She is down-spirited, then, when she does not meet him?"

"Sort of."

"Well, she will have to get over this. I've settled Frank's case, effectually, I think."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. You see I gave him the hint, the other day, that I desired him to discontinue his visits, here."

"I know; but he came."

"Well, I had an interview with him to-day, and commanded him to keep away from here. I told him that I was engaged to Dolly, and that we were to be married, within the month."

"What did he say?"

"Practically, nothing. He appeared rather dazed, and walked out of my presence without the violent manifestation I had looked for."

"Likely, then, he will not come any more."

"I think not. If he does come, they must not meet."

"I will try to prevent it, judge."

"Of course, like the sensible woman you are. You see, if a meeting can be avoided, it may be the means

of causing much trouble. Do you think Dolly has quite settled herself down to the fact that she is to marry me?"

"I am pretty sure. She is a sensible girl, and I keep praising you, and counseling her, until I am satisfied all will be well."

"It would be a great disgrace if she should back out. I have publicly announced our engagement, and made arrangements for starting on our European tour, immediately after our marriage."

"Yes?"

"And I am anxious for the day to come. You see I shall not be positively sure of the girl, until we are legally bound. Do you think there is any likelihood she could be urged to name a sooner date, Priscilla?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. Why sooner?"

"Well, you see, my dreams haven't been of the pleasant order, lately. I need not explain more, but you can understand. I shall not be positively easy until I put the Atlantic between me and America."

"Then, in case anything should happen, all the trouble—"

"Nonsense!" the judge interrupted. "But, let's drop the subject. It's not pleasant to dwell upon. Go call Dolly and tell her I want to see her."

"Haden't you better let her rest, judge? Her head aches, and I can tell you, from experience, that sick headache is not agreeable."

"Bah!" was the heartless reply; "she must not have time to rest. Rest generates thought, and thought might play the devil with my calculations. Besides, I've got a present for her."

Priscilla set aside her berry dishes, rose and entered the house.

She was gone several minutes, but when she returned she was accompanied by her niece.

Dolly was looking little less pale than when she had emerged from the tent of the Gypsy queen, and she scarcely nodded, when she saw the judge.

"Ah! dear, I am so sorry to hear you are not feeling well," he said, making room for her on the step. "You should take great care not to fatigue yourself with over-exertion, for what should I do were I to lose my bonnie little betrothed?"

"Hunt up another. I suppose," Dolly replied, passing her hand over her brow, wearily.

"Tut! tut! That is idle jest, dearest, for you know I might search the world over and not find one who could fill your place in my heart. See, I have brought you a little gift as a token of my affection."

And he placed a magnificent velvet-and-gold watch-case in her hands, at the same time touching a spring and causing the lid to fly open.

Inside, among the satin cushions, nestled a beautiful ladies' watch and chain, of gold, elaborately set with tiny sparkling diamonds.

It must have cost several hundred dollars at the least, and was a gift fit for a princess.

"Isn't it pretty?" the judge asked, eagerly.

"Very," Dolly replied, oddly—"too pretty, by half, for me to wear."

"Say not that, darling. There is nothing too pretty for you, and when we return from our wedding tour, you shall have the handsomest horses and carriages, money can procure."

"By the way, that calls to mind, the object of my visit here, to-day. I have learned, that, by sailing considerably sooner than we had originally intended we will arrive in England in time for the Derby races, which I suppose you may have heard, is an aristocratic event, in British life. So I want to ask you if we cannot arrange it to be married without delay, so as to take in one of the great attractions of our European tour?"

"No. I cannot consent to an earlier marriage day than the one already settled upon," Dolly said, without hesitation.

"But, why not? Sufficient costumers can be provided to fit out your wardrobe within a few days' time."

"It is not that. The time is short enough, that I am to remain single, and I would 'twere even longer. So I cannot think of making it even a day less."

She spoke firmly, and the judge had sense enough to know that he would not gain anything, by persistence.

"Oh! well, then, we will try and omit the Derby. But would you not like to accompany my daughter Jessie to the sea-shore for a couple of weeks, and stop at New York, on your way back, for your trousseau? This humdrum life at home must be dull for one so young and vivacious."

"You are very kind, sir, but I prefer to remain with aunt, until my marriage. Indeed, I think I should scarcely appreciate the European trip, I am such a homebody."

"Oh! that is because you have never traveled any. Once you travel you will like it. I will not detain you longer, dear, if your head aches, for I feel for you. But, if I were you, I would not go to the Gypsy camp, again. I like not the looks of those swarthy vagabonds. Say the best one can, of them, they are most undesirable persons."

Dolly did not make answer to this advice, but retired to her own room.

The judge looked somewhat anxious, after her departure.

"She looks more worried, than sick," he remarked, to Priscilla. "Confound it! can it be that she regrets her promise, and is pining after Frank?"

"Indeed, I don't know, judge—indeed I don't know. Girls are so strange, now, to what they used to be."

"Well, I'm blamed if I know what to do. I am in fidgets lest something happens. You see she refuses an earlier ceremony!"

"I had an idea she would."

"And to me it looks suspicious—as if she were still in love with Frank, and was loth to place the barrier of matrimony in the way of her freedom to enjoy his society."

"It may be so."

"Something must be done!" he gritted. "It will never do for me to lose, now. How would it do to keep her shut up in her room?"

Priscilla smiled—one of those vinegary smiles, it was, for which she was locally noted.

"That would end all your chances of ever making her your wife," she said.

"True. I might have known that. Well, I will see I must do something."

And with this conclusion he bid Priscilla adieu, got into his carriage, and drove away toward "Larchmont."

His face was dark with commingled passion and anxiety.

"I do not like the outlook," he muttered. "Frank's words, to-night, prove that he is henceforth my enemy, and he may cause me trouble. Something must be done—but what? He has led such an exceptionally good life that no charge can be brought against him that would make it necessary for him to leave this vicinity, to get out of the way of the law. If—"

But he did not finish the sentence.

"What the 'if' might have implied could only be left to conjecture."

But the strange glitter which flashed in the judge's eye, suggested that some evil thought had occurred to him, which, if put into execution, would rid him of the cause of his present anxiety.

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

SAM SLABSIDES accompanied Floss, the Gypsy girl, to the vicinity of the tribe's camp, and there took leave of her, she promising to see him on the morrow, at the deserted mansion, if possible.

After she left him, Sam began to cast about for some place to spend the remainder of the night, for he had no desire to return to the ghosts' headquarters. Shelter of some sort was to be desired, in preference to sleeping on the damp ground.

Following the road for a short distance, he found what was evidently a hay-barn, and not located very close to any habitation.

After scouting about the place, he discovered an open door, and soon after was ensconced upon a mow of newly-mown hay, which made the most comfortable bed he had enjoyed in months.

Here he lay, for fully an hour, in speculation as to what had become of old Felix Jacobi.

"Fer a rip-ripe myst'ry et takes the tar-heel!" he muttered; "and I'm a Phylmedelfy magistrate ef I know w'ot ter make uv it. Old Felix has evaporated from view, like steam from an engine. What makes it so curious is 'cause he allus did jest as I sed, before. Ef I told him ter set, while I went on a foraging expedishun, he allus sot, an' I found him thar when I cum back. Then, too, he wer' purty well fagged out ter-night, an' he wouldn't 'a' felt much like waltzin' off on his own hook—no, sir-ee!"

"Thar's some 'mighty queer goin's on up at 'tethouse on the hill; an' 'tain't no use talkin'. I b'lieve old Felix hev been gobble up by somebody or suthin' right 'bout them premises. But, w'ot fer? He ain't w'ith two cents in money, 'cause I've got the seven cents we captured to-day. He ain't no good fer soap-fat, 'cause he's leaner than a Jersey shrimp, an' he ain't the lost Charlie Ross, 'cause he's too old. Don't reckon the doctors would steal him fer his skeleton, an' he wouldn't elope wid a pretty gal, 'cause he couldn't see what color she was. Sow'ot's a feller ter think?"

"Then how 'bout thet ghost racket? My Gypsy mash let on she didn't b'lieve in ghosts, but them last yowls made'r kinder pale 'round the gills. Guess she's got a different opine now. But thet's some parts o' that aire ghost racket w'ot don't jibe."

"How the dickens is er floatin' speerit, w'ot's thinner thun er ten-cent zephyr, goin' ter pick up two twenty-pound chairs, an' carry 'em inter a parlor? An' how's sech a critter goin' ter haul off an' hit er feller a crack 'longside the jaw w' ther force o' a Sullivan? 'Pears ter me, too, thet them 'ere ghosts weren't trubbled w' consumption, thet way they yell. But—hello!"

This exclamation was caused by hearing a groan.

To such a state of excitement had the young tramp's nerves already been wrought up that night, that the sound caused a chill to run down his back.

It was undoubtedly a groan, and an unearthly one at that.

As near as Sam could judge, the sound came from the barn floor, at the opposite end of the building from the door where he had gained entrance.

"I wonder what's the next thing on the programme to frighten a feller out o' his wits?" he growled. "Can et be thet the ghosts hev follered me heer? Don't reckon et was a ghost what give thet groan. Sounded like some feller as hed a gripe thro' eatin' watermelon."

A moment later there reached his hearing another groan, similar to the first.

"There et goes ag'in! 'Tain't no ghost. Mebbe somebody's hurt!"

He had brought his lantern with him, unlit.

Groping about, he soon found a beam on which he could strike a match, and he had the lantern lit in a jiffy.

Then he slid from the mow to the floor.

As he did so, the light he carried shone upon a startling spectacle.

Lying upon the floor, face upward, and covered

with blood from head to foot, was one of the Jamison boys.

Blood had oozed from a knife-wound in the side of his neck, and another in his breast, and blood was smeared upon his face and hands.

His eyes were wide open and glassy, as they glared at the light, and it needed but a glance to tell that the poor fellow was dying.

Depositing the lamp on a box, Sam quickly knelt beside him.

"Good gracious!" he gasped, "it's the feller as was goin' to commit suicide—Frank Jamison! He went an' did it, sure enuff."

A groan escaped the sufferer, and his eyes became fixed upon the beggar's boy.

"Say! can yer talk?" Sam demanded.

The victim shook his head, and raising his hands, put them to his throat.

Then he rapidly went through a series of motions with his fingers.

"Oh! ye mean deaf an' dumb alfybet, eh?" Sam asked.

An affirmative nod of the head.

"All right. I can understand, if yer go it slow."

The fingers worked again.

This was the result:

"I have been murdered. Run, quick, for help!"

"Murdered!" Sam echoed. "Why, didn't you do this your self?"

"No! no! Quick! run! before I die!" was the answer, with the fingers.

Sam quickly sprung to his feet, and darted from the barn, leaving the lamp burning.

Over the fence he leaped, with the agility of a monkey, and away down the road, leading to Larchmont.

He knew there must be a farm-house not far away, and he ran like a deer to find it.

Less than a quarter of a mile on he came to one.

He pounded on the door, making enough noise, literally, to raise the dead.

In a few minutes an upper window was raised, and a voice called out:

"Who's there?"

"Where does Frank Jamison's folks live?"

"Two houses below."

"Well, I have jest found 'im layin' in the barn, up the road, murdered. You'd better go see to him, while I go tell his folks."

Then away darted Sam.

The next household he alarmed, and then sped on.

It will be remembered, though incidents had crowded close together, that it was not yet midnight.

When Sam reached Larchmont there was a bright light in the parlor, and music of a well-manipulated piano floated out through the open windows, upon the night—gay, operatic airs, that should have been a funeral dirge.

Sam, greatly excited, sprung over the low iron fence, thence up the lawn, onto the veranda, and without waiting for ceremony, jumped through one of the open casements, into the parlor.

Judge Jamison sat in an easy-chair, smoking.

Jessie, his pretty daughter, pre-ided at the piano.

The sudden advent of Sam Slabsides caused both to spring to their feet, with startled cries.

"Are you Jamison?" Sam breathlessly demanded.

"I am Judge Jamison, sir. What do you mean by this unseemly intrusion?"

"Are ye Frank Jamison's father?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then, come! Yer son lies murdered an' dyin', in a hay-barn, up the road. I jest found 'im. He's all stabbed up!"

Jessie Jamison uttered a scream, and sunk to the floor in a swoon.

The judge pulled a bell, then seizing his hat, cried:

"Lead on. I am ready."

They hastily left Larchmont, and hurried up the road.

"How did you come to find him?" the judge demanded.

"I was huntin' up a night's snooze, an' entered the barn. I heard a groan, an' on 'vestigatin', found 'im."

"How do you know it's my son?"

"See'd him to-day, an' talked w' him up at the pond."

Sam made no further statement.

He was too much out of breath.

When they reached the barn, several neighbors were already there, with lanterns.

"Is he dead?" cried the judge, rushing into the building.

"Yes, judge, he breathed his last a moment ago," a grizzled old farmer said.

The judge knelt by the body, with an audible groan, his face as white as death.

"Frank! Frank!" he gasped, and then buried his face in his hands, and shook with emotion.

But there came no answering voice.

Death had stolen away the spirit of the young man, and left behind but the chilling, lifeless clay.

The eyes, wide open and glassy, gazed straight upward, accusingly.

For several minutes, the judge remained kneeling, and during this time, the other spectators stood by, maintaining a grave silence.

Finally, however, the judge arose, and said:

"This is terrible. It is the worst blow I have experienced since the death of my wife. Who, in all this community, would have grudge enough against Frank to have perpetrated this fearful crime?"

"Alas! we know not when we have enemies among us," old farmer Norris said, with a wise shake of his head.

"When did you see Frank, last?"

Just before dark, in Maple Lane, not far from the Gypsy camp. He and Ralph were there, conversing together."

"Where is Ralph now?"

"I do not know. He generally spends a good share of the night at R—."

The judge then turned to Sam Slabsides.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded.

"My name is Sam Slabsides."

"Where do you live?"

"In the winter, I blacks boots, in Philymedelfy. In the summer, I travels in the country, doin' odd jobs for my livin'."

"You are a tramp, then?"

"S'pose that's w'ot big-bugs would call me."

"Do you belong to the Gypsies?"

"Nary! I travels on me own hook."

"You found my son here?"

"Yes. I was up at an old house, 'bove here, 'fore the rain. Intended to hang up my hat there, fer the night, but spooks skeered me out, an' so I cum down here. The soft side o' a hay mow struck me as bein' a snap, an' I come in the barn, an' got on the mow."

"Well?"

"Well, I lay awhile, without gittin' asleep. Bymeby I heard a groan—then, another 'un. Then, I lit yonder tin lamp, which I found up at the spook-house, an' I found yer son layin' there."

"Did he speak to you?"

"Not w' his mouth. I axed him could he speak, an' he shook his head. Then, he sed, in deaf an' dumb signs: 'I've been murdered; run, quick, fer help! Then, I axed him didn't he do it hisself. He sed 'No! no! quick! run before I die!' So you bet I lit out, lively."

"Did he tell you his name was Frank Jamison?"

"No."

"Then, how did you know it?"

"I see'd him up by the pond, at sunset. He was goin' in swimmin', but he see'd me sittin' on the fence, an' wouldn't go in. Guess he was afraid I'd steal his shoes—but I wouldn't. We had a talk, an' I found out his name."

The judge turned to farmer Norris.

"Norris, you take charge of this lad, and keep a close watch over him, till the inquest to-morrow. His testimony may be valuable. We will take Frank home, and hold an examination, at ten, to-morrow."

"Very well, sir. Bub, you come along home with me," the farmer said.

"All right. S'pose you'll give a feller somethin' to eat, won't yer, fer I hain't bin feedin' high, sence I struck into this valley?"

"Yes, you shall have all you want."

So Sam accompanied farmer Norris to his home, one of the most substantial in the valley.

The other neighbors raised the corpse from the barn floor, and forming a strange nocturnal procession, wended their way down the road, toward Larchmont, Judge Jamison stalking along in front, grim and silent.

Was he thinking:

"Well, the barrier has been removed, and there is nothing, now, to prevent my union with Dolly Denning."

If his thought did not run in such a train, he could hardly regret that the hand of the assassin had done its work, that dark night; but, stern man of the world though he was, it must be that he wished those staring glassy eyes would once more sparkle with the radiant light of life!

CHAPTER VII.

GUYANDOTTE'S GRIP.

WITH an author's privilege, we will make a slight and necessary retrogression, for all the incidents of that eventful night have not yet been chronicled.

Some two hours previous to Sam Slabsides's hasty visit to Larchmont, the judge sat alone in his handsome parlor.

His daughter was out calling at a neighbor's, and the servants were all in their quarters at the rear of the house.

The windows were open, and the lights burning with medium brightness, and the judge, his chin resting on one hand, appeared absorbed in a reverie.

A man came down the dark road, and paused in front of the house.

It was Gril Guyandotte, the Gypsy.

His face wore a sinister expression, and his eyes gleamed cunningly.

From where he had paused a good view of the interior of the parlor was obtainable, and Judge Jamison could be seen sitting in his easy-chair.

After satisfying himself that the judge was alone, Guyandotte stealthily entered the lawn, stepped upon the piazza, and in a moment stood within the parlor.

A low laugh on his part caused Jamison to look up, and he immediately afterward sprung to his feet with an oath.

"Yar!" he uttered.

"I!" Guyandotte declared. "Don't you dare!"

This, as Jamison's hand made a move toward his pistol-pocket for a weapon.

Jamison desisted. He caught the gleam of something silvery in the Gypsy's hand.

"Sit down!" Guyandotte ordered, helping himself to a chair—"or first, fetch out a bottle of wine."

"Tain't often I drink wine, and when I do, I like to drink it with an old friend, and a gentleman. This idea of tipping over a bar is for common folk, you know."

Lennox Jamison crossed the room to a magnificent ebony cabinet, and returned with a bottle of Montebello and glasses, which he placed upon a little stand he wheeled between them.

Then he dropped into a chair.

"Well," he said, "what brought you here?"

"Horseflesh, wago s and fate, I suppose," the other replied, nonchalantly.

"By the way, smokel!" and the judge laid a hand

ful of cigars on the table. "They're good—you know I always was a martyr to good weed."

His unwelcome guest took the proffered cigar, at the same time remarking:

"And so I find you here, settled down like a lord, in fancied security."

"Why not? Is there any reason why I should not?"

"Well, that's a matter of question. Of course I never expected to see you again, but blundered accidentally against you. Others, you know, might do the same."

"Bah!"

"Oh! well, of course I don't say it to frighten you. You didn't use me and the boys quite right; still, I bear you no particular animosity."

The disagreeable expression upon Jamison's face did not indicate that he placed much faith in the latter assertion.

He took a pad of paper from his pocket, wrote upon the front page, tore it off, and handed it to Gril Guyandotte.

"In conversing, refer to numbers," he said; "for you must be aware that I am not alone in this house."

Guyandotte regarded the paper with a peculiar smile.

"I see!" he said, dryly.

"You ought to. You have it plain enough. Now then, what reason have I to feel concerned?"

"Well, in the first place, in our wanderings last summer, we struck a little town in Connecticut, where Number One once lived, and I found out that he had been back there within a couple of years, and found out considerable more than he had known before."

"The deuce!"

"Yes. Well, I picked up what I could, and found there was not a pleasant prospect in store for a certain party, if ever found."

"Go on!"

"I am high-cock-a-lorum of the Gypsies, and I sought to get on track of Number One, and by dint of luck, more than good management, succeeded."

"Ah!"

"You bet! I kept on track, and though he led us a queer journey, we prospered, and I was never without some tidings of him, though he had no idea of anything of the sort."

"And you have kept track of him to date?" Judge Jamison cried, excitedly.

"Yes—that is, until quite recently."

"Where is he now?"

"What would you give to know?"

The scowl deepened on the judge's face.

"So, that's your racket, is it?" he gritted. "If so, you've come to the wrong place to work it."

"Pshaw! you talk crazy. I never met a villain yet, but what he was suspicious."

"Sir-r-h!"

"Oh, excuse my intimation that you were a villain. I know better. I know you to be a model gentleman. So am I. Ostensibly a wandering Bohemian, I can be as fine a gentleman as ever graced a drawing-room—ay! have been, and you know it. I have not yet lost my faculty of filling old gaps, though I've led a checkered life. Who was it, though, who gave me the position of brakeman (from which I was advanced to associate manager) on the great incline road, over which the passengers are nine times out of ten taken but one way—down-hill? I don't think you would have to rack your memory much to remember."

"Enough of this, sir!" Jamison cried, angrily. "I seriously doubt if the party lives, or, if living, that you know anything of him."

"You are welcome to your doubts."

"Where is he, then? I'll give you a thousand dollars to put me on track of him!"

"Agreeable always to money consideration, I accept the offer. But, you will have to wait a day or two, until I send my time-tried scouts to ascertain his exact whereabouts. Calculating time, I do not think he can be more than twenty miles from here now. So, when I locate him, I shall expect my money."

"And you shall have it."

"Very well. I will take you at your word and act accordingly."

There was a brief silence, and then the judge said:

"What of Two and Three?"

"I know nothing about them. The world has swallowed them up, I guess."

"Better so," was the remark that followed, grimly.

"Oh, I don't know. They were not to blame. It was a damnable deception, and I wonder you live to-day to remember it, considering that at that very time you had a trusting wife and child living."

Jamison grated his teeth.

His eyes flashed fury, and he would have tried to kill the cool Gypsy opposite, but for fear of being killed himself.

"I saw Four to-day, also, much to my surprise," Gril Guyandotte went on, triumphantly. "Of course I knew her, for she has not changed, except in size. Judging from what I know of her residence, it would not be a hard matter to find Five!"

"There! don't get mad, judge, but let your passion cool off until you are in a fit condition to consider. Then, I haven't a doubt you will be ready to agree that, if used right, I will be always a right bower. I'm back for camp, now"—rising—"and don't worry; we'll fix things all right—but quietly, you know. If you meet me in the camp, of course we are strangers. I suppose I might take this Montebello, along, eh?"

"Yes!" gruffly, "and this, too."

The judge drew a roll of bills from his pocket as large as his thumb and forefinger could encircle, and tossed it on the table.

"Thanks! I'll not forget you," Guyandotte said, and then left the parlor with eyes that scintillated like diamonds.

The judge was left alone to his reflections.

CHAPTER IX.

SAM "STRIKES" ILE."

SAM SLABSIDES would have doubted if it was his best policy to accompany farmer Norris home, had he not taken a sudden liking to the gray-haired old man, who had the general appearance of sturdy honesty, seen in but so few.

Nothing in particular was said, until the twain reached the farm-house.

Here Sam was conducted into the large, airy kitchen, seated at the table, and liberally supplied with rich milk, bread and butter, and a whole luscious pumpkin pie, with the command to help himself.

Then the old farmer seated himself and lit his pipe, while nodding his head rather mysteriously.

"Yes! yes! it's a strange thing," he said, slowly, "a strange, strange affair."

"What's strange?" queried Sam, with his mouth full of pie.

"This murder. Frank Jamison was a nice young man, and highly esteemed by everybody. Who could have been cowardly enough to have raised their hand against him, surpasses my comprehension. There is not a young man in the county who could hold a candle to him in point of uprightness of character."

"Yer don't say! Guess, 'cordin' ter that, his brother air kind o' a black sheep?" Sam suggested.

"Yes. Ralph is more wild, spirited, and reckless. I would not have thought it strange if it was him who had been murdered, for he drinks, and gambles, and has been in several shooting affrays. However, it ain't established whether it is Frank or Ralph who is dead."

"It hain't?"

"By no means. And it may prove difficult to prove it."

"Why so?"

"Because Frank and Ralph were exact counterparts in every particular. In face, in form, and mannerisms, and in dress they were just alike. If one had a photograph taken, there was no use of the other one sitting, for the result would be an exact duplicate. So positively were they alike that the judge took pains that their attire and jewelry should correspond, to a dot. Their hair and eyes were alike, and the former combed alike. They were of the same size and weight, and one could not be told from the other, except that Frank was of more quiet, easy temperament than Ralph, and that Ralph had a liking for wine, cards and hunting, and a distaste for female society, where Frank had not."

"Phew! that's funny. Then, they'll have to ax the t'other brother whether he's livin' or dead?"

"They will have to take his word, to a large extent, as to whether he is Frank or Ralph, and judge the balance by observation of his habits. So if the one that is living wanted to play off that he was the other, it would not be a hard matter by any means."

Sam had made up his mind to keep mum, for the present, about Frank Jamison's attempt at suicide, until he saw how matters turned out.

"Say! how about the racket up at the old house on the hill?" Sam asked as he finished his supper, or breakfast, whichever it might most appropriately be termed. "What sort of a circus d'ye call it, anyhow?"

Farmer Norris smiled.

"Well, now, you've asked me a question hard to answer," he said. "John Van Gelder committed suicide three years ago, and since that time there's been some curious rumors about the place, and no one could ever be tempted to buy, or rent the premises. Two or three families moved there first along, but not a one of 'em stayed a week out."

"Durned ef I blame 'em. I was goin' ter hang up my hat there last night, but changed my mind pritty sudden."

"Why so?"

"Well, in the fu'st place, I wisited the parlor, an' re'd ther notis, an' see'd where Van Gelder split himself inter kingdom come. While I was standin' in the middle o' the room, a-viewin' ther sityvation, some ornery mean rabbit hit me smack 'longside the jaw, that made my teeth chatter. I looked around quicker than a wink, an' I'll be hanged ef there was a soul near me."

"You don't say!"

"But I do tho', an' I'll be skinned fer a shad ef I ain't givin' et to ye straight."

"Well! well! What next?"

"Waal, I went ter nosin' 'round, ag'in, an' I heerd a screech that made goose-quills rise up on me head. Then I tuk chairs out on the peazzer an' sot down. Then I tried another investigation, an' when I cum back, the chairs hed bin tuk back inter the parlor, an' put where I got 'em from. Then ther 'wer' more shrieks an' yellin', an' I concluded to light out, fer better 'commodations. So I hit the barn, an' run onter a corpus, or purty near one. Durned ef I ain't a reg'lar red-combed rooster fer gittin' inter scrapes."

"It would appear so. These mysterious things have been going on at the Van Gelder mansion, for so long, and have time and again so baffled investigation, that no one goes near there any more except strangers, for many believe the devil has charge of the place. Van Gelder was a hard drinker, and not well liked. The Jamison boys were his nephews—

for I suppose you don't know that they are but adopted sons of Judge Jamison?"

"No."

"Well, they are. The old mansion belongs to them, but is of no salable value. There are many who believe that Van Gelder left a fortune when he died, but no trace of it was ever found."

"Was Frank and Ralph good friends?"

"Yes—the best of friends. I never heard that they had a quarrel."

They conversed awhile longer and then Sam said: "I hain't told ye quite all, Mister Norris, an' if you won't say nothin', I'll tell ye somethin' else that's happened. Of course, 'tain't a secret, but I want a chance to consider, before I give the matter away to everybody."

"Go on, my boy; I will do as you wish."

"Well, you see, since I started out on the tramp this season, I've bin travelin' snucks wi' an' old blind beggar, named Felix Jacobi."

"A blind beggar?"

"Yas—blind as a no-eyed bat. He an' I met, compared notes, an' he allowed he'd like to hoof et along wi' me. So we made a bargain, and set out. Yer see, a few years ago Felix was robbed of a fortune by highwaymen, an' vitriol was throw in his eyes, destroying his sight!"

"Horrible! horrible!"

"Well, I should smile! You see, previously, Jacobi's home had been broken up, and other money of his appropriated, by a distant relative, and Felix lays the later crime to this same man—is positive 'twas him. So, since that time he's bin wandering around the country begging, in hopes he will yet run across this man. He sez ef he ever hears his voice, he will know him. I took a notion to the poor old chap, and so hev helped him along all I could."

"You are a noble-hearted lad, sir—you are to be most highly commended. But, go on."

"Well, ye see, Felix an' I struck the spook-trap to-night together, and allowed et would be a good place to put up, and git out o' the rain. So I left Felix settin' on the peazzer, while I went inter the house, to size up the 'commodations. When I come back—wasn't gone over twenty minnits all told—Felix was gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes, he was. I was skeered, an' 'tween flashes o' lightnin', I searched the hull premises, outside the house, even lookin' round the bottom of the bluff, but couldn't find no trace o' him. Then I found a tin lamp, lit it, and explored the house frum cellar to garret, but nary a Felix could I find."

"Why, this is certainly strange."

"Lam me fer a lobster, ef et ain't. No, sir, I couldn't find Felix nowhere, an' hed to give et up as a bad job."

"Why, surely he must have wandered away!"

"Don't b'lieve nothin' o' the sort. He wa'n't that sort uv a hair-pin. Allus when I told him ter wait fer me, he did et, jest like pie. Ther wasn't nothin' crazy ner one-hoss about him, and he wern't fond o' waltzin' around alone, fer fear he'd break his neck."

"Then how do you account for his disappearance?"

"Dunno. Looks queer as a cat on er clothesline. I've got an idear in my head that ther ghost bizness is all skim-milk bosh, and that there's some sort of a gang hangs out there, an' they collared on ter Felix fer some purpose or other."

"Oh! I guess not. Folks did think that once, but a close examination of the house and grounds was made and nothing was discovered."

"Well, then, I've been floored wid another idear. Mebbe old Felix's enemy lives around these parts, an' got wind of Felix bein' in ther vicinity, an' kid-napped him."

"Ther might be something in that. What was this enemy's name?"

"Milo Mitchell!"

"Milo Mitchell, eh? Then I can answer that no such person lives within twenty miles of here, for I know the names of every inhabitant of the town and county."

"But it ain't likely Mitchell would go under his own name."

"Perhaps not."

"Well, I'm goin' to find old Felix ef I have to send ter Philamedelfy for the hull detective force," Sam said, with determination. "I ain't the sort uv a shoe-black as would sneak off an' leave an old feller like him in trouble. Nix-es!"

"A good resolution, Samuel, and one well worthy of support. I am much interested in the case, and as long as you remain in this neighborhood you must make your home with me, and I will do what I can to assist you. I have no one but my hired help, and like young company."

"All right, boss. Just as lief put up here as anywhere else, and I'm much obliged fer the offer."

A little later the conversation began to lag, and telling Sam to lie on a comfortable lounge, in the kitchen, Mr. Norris went off to bed in another part of the house.

Sam did not immediately lie down.

He sat for some time in meditation.

Then he thrust his hand in his pocket and drew forth the letter he had found in the cellar of the Van Gelder mansion.

"I had forgotten all about this," he said, surveying the superscription on the envelope, with one eye partly squinted. "Lennox H. Jamison, eh? That must be the chap they call Judge, and who looked at me as tho' he weren't favorably impressed wi' my senatorial aspect. Wonder who's bin writin' to the judge, an' how the letter come to be where I found it!"

He tore away the envelope and unfolded the half-sheet of paper it had contained.

The next moment a strange cry burst from his lips—a cry of commingled joy and surprise.

And little wonder, for this is what he read:

"LENNOX H. JAMISON, alias MILO MITCHELL:—

"If you do not call upon me at once, and pay me the hush-money you promised, I will have you landed in jail before twenty-four hours more pass over your accursed head. I mean business now."

"JOHN VAN GELDER."

"By the holy smoke of sacrifice!" burst from Sam's lips, "I've struck ile, sure's there's muscle in a mule's hind legs. Ag'in does it occur to me that I never goes anywhere but what suthin's to pay. Jewhittaker! here's ripe old news for old Felix, ef I only knew where to find him. He sed he thought he wasn't fur from his destination, an' he was right. Glory hallelujy! I feel like er comet or a mornin'-star!"

And it was evident he did, for he sprung to his feet and danced about the room, flourishing the letter in the air, while his eyes gleamed with excitement.

Remembering clearly and concisely the story of old Felix Jacobi's life, as it had been told him, it was not strange that the sudden discovery developed by the letter set him in a triumphant mood.

Finally, however, he ceased his gyrations and sat down.

"Samuel Slabsides, coming senator," he said, "you're arrived at er period in life when yer orter make some sort o' a splurge thet would win yerself fame an' fortune, an' git yer name inter politics. Ther is various avenues fer reachin' fame, but ther majority uv 'em leads ye til ye fetch up behind iron bars. Thet ain't yer ambition, by a long shot. Here's er opportunity ter constertoot yerself inter a detective an' do ther honest injine by old Felix, who can't tell flies from blackberries when he's eatin'. Yes, sir—ee! here's a ripe chance fer ye ter show ther kind o' kids Philamedelfy perdooces, an' make a high-toned willain pull down his sails ter 'he tune o' the Rogue's march. It's settled—by gum! it's settled! Dig yer head, Sam'l, an' henceforemost 'stonish ther nation by showin' 'em thet ye'r a son o' Justice, a cousin ter Law, an' the every-day mash uv ther Goddess o' Liberty. Hip! hip! hooray!"

And unable longer to restrain himself, Sam gave the cheer with a vengeance that speedily caused farmer Norris to pop into the kitchen.

"Why, boy, what on earth is the matter?" he demanded. "Have you gone crazy?"

"He! he! he!" yelled Sam, dancing about. "I've struck ile, an', by cracky, she's a seven-hundred-bar'l spouter, too!"

CHAPTER X.

THE INVESTIGATION.

WHEN the next morning had dawned over that beauteous Kentucky valley, the rumor had widely spread that Frank Jamison had been foully murdered.

Quiet and unassuming as his habits had been, Frank was widely known, much of his popularity coming from the fact that he was a decided favorite among the ladies, both old and young; and what power can make a man famous more than the general esteem of the tender sex?

At Larchmont Ralph Jamison had not returned until three in the morning, and then in such a stupid state that he was scarcely able to get into the library, where he fell upon the sofa, and into a state of oblivion.

No one went near him, except one.

Judge Jamison had retired to his room; Jessie was in her apartment, grief-stricken; the servants of Larchmont were in the kitchen, in grim and low-toned council—and Doctor Kendall, of the neighboring town, who had been summoned by the servants, when Jessie swooned, kept watch over the body of the dead.

A young man in years and practice, he was yet the Jamison family physician and a friend to the boys.

He had offered to watch over the dead, and the offer was not refused.

It was Kendall who had let Ralph in, seen his condition, and guided the drunken unfortunate to the sofa.

Then Kendall took a chair, sat down, and studied the liquor-inflamed face. For minutes he would sit thus, then he would spend similar time in the grand parlor, where, upon a white-covered double table, lay the body of the murdered man.

The face and hands had been cleansed, and the neck-wound covered over. Otherwise, according to the law, the body was in the same condition as when found.

Kendall spent the hours intervening between three o'clock and four in this singular observation of the two persons.

But at last he ceased his flitting movements, and shook his head as if in doubt.

He did not do this until he had examined every pocket of the drunken man, and found nothing.

The dead man's pockets had been searched, with a like result.

After finishing his scrutiny, Doctor Kendall sat for some time in a deep study, then he prepared a powerful liquid mixture, small in quantity but numerous of ingredients, and forced it into the drunken brother's mouth.

He then laid down and awaited for the coming of morning.

Day dawned cold and gray, considering that it was summer, and the sullen appearance of the sky seemed to indicate there was in prospect a steady rain of several days' duration.

The household at Larchmont was astir early, and,

before he left, Doctor Kendall got Ralph Jamison out of his drunken stupor, and took him in where his brother lay white and rigid in death.

That Ralph was shocked and horrified was evident, but he gave away to no outward expression of emotion.

He appeared to utter a silent prayer over the dead; then, with a groan, he turned and walked mechanically from the house.

The morning passed rapidly, and when the time arrived for the coroner's inquest, at least a couple of hundred people gathered at Larchmont, eager and curious.

When the county coroner arrived, a jury was at once impaneled, and the body of the murdered man was viewed.

The crowd then adjourned to the big hay-barn, where it was thought best to hold the inquest.

The premises were viewed, and a new discovery made, namely, that there was a trail of blood from the highway to the barn!

Therefore it was evident that the murdered man had been attacked while walking along the road, although there were no other signs than the blood of a desperate struggle having taken place.

After some little delay the examination began, and Judge Jamison took the stand.

His name was Lennox H. Jamison, he stated, and he was the foster-father of the deceased, and likewise of the brother of the deceased, the two young men being known respectively as Frank and Ralph Jamison.

Was the judge positive that the murdered man was Frank, and not Ralph?

Yes, he thought he was, although he could not swear to it, as he had not questioned his living son, nor had anything been found on the murdered man's person to identify him, and it was a well known fact that the brothers were exactly alike.

Were the two brothers on friendly terms?

Yes, entirely so.

When had the judge seen them last, together?

The night previous, near the Gypsy camp, where they were conversing.

Had he seen them later, separately?

Only Ralph, this morning, when he was recovering from a spree.

Had the judge any idea who committed the murder?

None whatever.

Farmer Norris testified that he had been aroused from bed by a young lad, who had stated that there was a murdered man at the barn—Frank Jamison. The boy had gone on to notify Judge Jamison; Norris and his hired men had hastened to the barn, and found Frank Jamison breathing his last.

Some other like testimony followed and then, Sam Slabsides was put on the stand, and told substantially the same story as on the previous night. He was cross-questioned, by the coroner, but nothing was gained by it.

"This boy is rather a doubtful character!" Judge Jamison said, "and is the only one who seems to know much about the mysterious affair. Therefore I deem it necessary that he be held in custody, pending a further investigation."

"You will have to secure a warrant for his arrest," said farmer Norris, "and in that event I will go his bail, in any amount. So there's no practical use of bothering the boy. It is not at all reasonable to suppose that the boy was concerned in the murder."

"I don't know about that. It won't do any harm to make sure. You seem to have taken a peculiar interest in the vagabond, Norris?"

"So I have. He is a worthy young lad."

"Well," the coroner said, after Doctor Kendall had testified to the cause of young Jamison's death, "is there any one else who knows anything about the matter?"

"I've got suthin' to say," a rough-dressed fellow said, stepping forward. "I'm Jim Bilks, an' I work fer Priscilla Tanglefoot."

"Well, sir?"

"Well, late yesterday afternoon, I was mowin' in a field 'jinin' the lane, an' nigh the cottage, when I see'd Dolly Denning an' Ralph Jamison comin' from the direction o' the Gypsy camp, an' I see'd one o' the Gyps sorter doggin' 'em. It roused my curiosity, an' I hid by the fence to see what was the racket."

"Well, sir, how do you know it was Ralph Jamison, who accompanied Miss Denning?"

"Because, when they got opposite me, the young man sed he guessed he wouldn't go no further, an' Dolly sed I'm ever so much obliged to you, Ralph, good-afternoon;" then she hurried on, to the cottage."

"Well?"

"Well, when Ralph turned to go back, he saw the Gypsy standing behind a tree, close by. Ralph made for him an' demanded who he was. Gypsy sed he was Gril Guyandotte. Ralph wanted to know what he meant by dogging him. Gypsy said he wasn't dogging—that he had come for a walk. Ralph good as told him he was a liar, and drawing a pistol, told him to get back to camp, or he'd put a bullet through him, and to keep away from the cottage, if he valued his personal safety. The Gypsy went, but he looked as if he could murder Ralph with a good will. That's why I reckon it's Ralph that's murdered, an' not Frank."

"I do not believe it. Frank never drank, and Ralph did," Judge Jamison spoke up, "and Ralph came in, this morning, in a beasily state of intoxication."

"Where is he, now?"

"He is here!" a voice cried, and the young inebriate walked unsteadily into the coroner's presence.

His eyes were bloodshot, and he looked rather baggard.

"Are you Ralph Jamison?" the coroner demanded.

"I am."

"Where were you last night?"

"In R—, playing cards and drinking."

"When did you see your brother, last?"

"At Maple Lane, just at dusk. He was angry at the judge who he claimed had robbed him of Dolly Denning's affections and made threats upon the judge's life. So great was his anger, that he left me, and walked rapidly toward home. I followed, slowly. I passed Larchmont, and went on to R—, but saw nothing of Frank about the house."

"Is this story about your encounter with Gril Guyandotte correct?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no longer any doubt but what the dead man is Frank Jamison?"

"None, whatever."

"Have you any idea who could have committed the crime?"

"That question can better be answered at court. I could not give an opinion at present, as I might be dead wrong."

The coroner then charged the jury, and they agreed upon the verdict that Frank Jamison came to his death through the fatal effect of three dagger wounds, administered by a party or parties unknown.

When the verdict had been rendered, farmer Norris arose to depart, but Judge Jamison called him back.

"I have ordered Constable Sager to arrest this boy, Sam Slabsides, on suspicion of having been concerned in the murder, and shall take him at once to R—for a hearing. If you propose to go his bail, you had better go along."

And so to R—the majority of the crowd went.

Sam Slabsides was taken before a magistrate, and had a hearing.

It is useless to recount it here.

He was rigidly examined, and gave precisely the same general story he had told at the inquest. All the cross-examination failed to divert his testimony in the least, and the occasional witty answers he gave, or his outlandish phraseology, won him many friends.

Nevertheless, he was bound over to court in the sum of two thousand dollars' bail.

Being rich, farmer Norris pleasantly qualified with bail bonds, and Sam was released.

The suggestion having been put that Gril Guyandotte might have murdered Frank Jamison, believing him to be Ralph, a warrant for his arrest was promptly sworn out, and the constable and a posse of men sent to arrest him.

As soon as Sam's bail was fixed, he and farmer Norris set out on their return to "Honeybrook," the good farmer's home.

It might as well be added, right here, that Norris knew all about the letter Sam had found, for the young tramp had shown it to him.

"He, he!" Norris chuckled, as they trudged along the dusty road. "Jamison tried hard to get you committed to jail, Sammy, but old John Norris has got as much power as he has."

"Yes, an' ye'r the best friend I ever had," Sam replied, gratefully. "I'm a swearin' senator if I won't make it warm for his judgeship, 'fore I'm ninety year old. D'yer know, I believe he knows where old Felix is?"

"That's what I think, and that he has caused him to be put out of the way. Knowing that you were with Felix, and fearing that you might know too much, he wanted to get you into jail on a serious charge, where you would have no power to harm him."

"By jingo! That's it, you bet. But he didn't come it, did he? Nix-eel! An' now, when I git my detective machine workin' right, there'll be a s'prise round these diggin's, eh?"

"Yes, my boy; but we shall have to go slow—we shall have to go slow. I'm your friend, and will help you what I can; but we must plan well before we pitch in. There is no doubt in my mind now but what Milo Mitchell is a desperate man, and your movements must be guarded with extreme caution. If Jamison or Mitchell really suspects you of knowing anything of Jacob's story, and that you have an eye on him—the judge—he will not hesitate to plot mischief against you. The first, and only thing to be done, seems to me, is to find Jacob."

"Yes," Sam assented, thoughtfully—"that's what is on the bill for first act. What will foller will hev to be found out by 'sperience."

His head was full of jostling thoughts in connection with his new detective enterprise, and it was liable to take some time to get them straightened out so they would run smoothly. Once he succeeded, he surely had grit and push enough about him to make something out of the case before him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CONFAB IN A CORNFIELD.

THE party that left R—, headed by Constable Sager, to visit the Gypsy camp, did not meet with the success they had anticipated.

On arriving at the camp, they found everything quiet and orderly, but their inquiry for Gril Guyandotte was met with the assertion that Gril was not in the camp, had not been since daybreak, and that nothing was known of his whereabouts since.

Nevertheless, a thorough search was made, and Jim Bilks, who had come along to identify Guyandotte, failed to find any one resembling him.

So, in order to get further orders from the sheriff, the party returned to R—; the constable, however, ordering the Gypsies not to move from their encampment until further notice, under penalty of arrest.

The fact that the Gypsy was not to be found at the camp, seemed to indicate that he was hiding somewhere, and if hiding, why, unless he was guilty of the murder?

Accordingly, the sheriff had a reward notice posted at every approach to the town, and for miles around during the day, and the excitement ran high.

Numerous parties, covetous of the money offered for Guyandotte's capture, started forth in search of him, and the surrounding country was scoured thoroughly, but without result.

At Honeybrook farm, Sam Slabsides put in the balance of the day quietly, after returning from R—.

In under the shade of a great oak tree upon the lawn, he lay stretched out upon the grass, busying his brain both with conjecture, and forming plans.

He had made no attempt to visit the Van Gelder mansion, for one of the scouting parties had gone in that direction, and he concluded he had better keep away from the place, for the immediate present, at any rate.

Toward evening, farmer Norris called him into the house.

"Sammy, can you ride a horse?" he asked.

"Can I!" exclaimed Sam, "well, I should murmur and blush! Why, I'm a reg'lar daisy-bender, you bet. Used ter ride in a circus, couple seasons ago, till the show bu'sted, an' I had ter fut ev' home. Don't know much 'bout ther good p'int's uv ther anymile, but I kin ride like a reg'lar ranchero."

"Very well. I want you to ride over to R— and mail a letter for me, which I forgot to do to-day. While you are there, get yourself a serviceable suit of clothing, shoes, shirts, a hat, and whatever you may need. If there is any money left, you can keep it for pocket change."

And Mr. Norris laid a stamped letter in Sam's hands, and on top of it a fifty-dollar note.

Sam's astonishment can better be imagined than described.

"Why—why I don't want'er take this!" he said. "These 'ere togs are big enough fer me."

"No, they are not. You are deserving of better ones, and you are welcome to the money; and now hurry, so as to get back before it is long after dark."

After thanking his benefactor gratefully, Sam went out to the stable, where he found a saddled horse in waiting for him in the charge of one of the farm hands.

Mounting, Sam galloped away toward R—in high spirits.

When he reached the town, he first of all visited the post-office and deposited the letter, then, he set about making purchases.

"Thar ain't no sorter use o' my making a dude out o' myself by sportin' around in expensive togs," he argued, "an' so I'll go lightly an' have some money left."

Accordingly, he was judicious in making his purchases, and when he was supplied with a suit of clothes, shirts, collars, hose, shoes and hat, he still had over twenty-five dollars left.

Hiring an expressman to deliver the articles at Honeybrook farm, he next sought a hardware store, and here purchased a revolver and cartridges, a bull's-eye lantern and some strong cord.

The clerk, who had been present at the hearing, looked doubtful when Sam asked for the articles.

"I don't know as I have any business to sell such things to you," he said. "What do you want them for? Are you going to start forth as a highway robber, or what?"

"I'm goin' ter start forth as *what*!" Sam replied, good-naturedly. "Just you toss out the articles, and your cash is ready."

"But, I want to know what you are going to do with them?"

"Well, if you want'er get down that fine, I don't mind tellin' you that to vindicate my character, I'm goin' ter hunt up Gril Guyandotte, who is accused of the murder. Thar ain't no noose goin' around this senatorial speakin'-tube of mine—not if I know it. So, Guyandotte bein' a desprit character, I s'pose I might have to face him with a steel muzzle."

The argument favored Sam, and he got the articles he desired.

He then remounted his horse, and rode back toward Honeybrook farm.

It was not his intention to stop at the farm, but to go on to the Van Gelder mansion, and there subject the place to another careful exploration.

He changed his mind, however, and stopped at the farm long enough to stable the horse, and tell farmer Norris of his proposed venture.

"You had better be careful, my boy," the farmer said, advisingly. "The place, as you know, is surrounded with mystery, and there is no telling what trouble you may get into."

"The more the merrier," Sam replied. "I've got a 'pop,' and if the ghosts come skylarking around me, they will get all the cold lead they need as a tonic. Guess ther ghosts won't git no chance to crack me alongside the jaw to-night—not ef I know myself."

So, after supplying himself with some matches, Sam left the farm-house, and took his way toward the alleged haunted mansion.

He had not gone far, when he heard a girlish voice call out:

"Sam! Sam! Is that you?"

"You bet it's me; but who and where are you?" Sam replied, gazing about him inquiringly, for it was so dark he could scarcely see ten feet before him.

A moment later his query was answered, in the shape of Floss, the Gypsy girl appearing before him. "Now, do you see who I am?" she said, with a musical laugh. "I had a premonition that you

would come this way to-night, and I've been watching for you for nearly an hour. Oh! isn't it awful about the murder?"

"Werry!" Sam assented. "There is a myst'ry about that thing, an' a deep one, too, or my senatorial brain ain't in workin' order. Where is Gril Guyandotte?"

"That is the very thing I came to see you about. Are you my friend?"

"Are I? Well, I guess. You and I are too good lookin' to be enemies. Fer instance, jest size up my Henry Clay phiz, and tell me ef I look like a sweet-scented sardine as wouldn't fight his finger-nails off fer a purty little dame like yourself."

"Then, if you do like me, I will tell you something," Floss said, with childlike simplicity. "Gril Guyandotte wishes to see you."

"Wants ter see me?"

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"He will make that known when you meet him. He is hiding, but Sam, it was not Gril who killed Frank Jamison."

"How do you know?"

"I do n't know, more than that I believe his word next to Gospel. Although to the world a Gypsy, and at one time in the wrong, he has now reformed his habits, and leads a life without a blemish. To him mother and I are indebted for many kindnesses."

"Keerect! He's the very chap I want to see. Where is he?"

"You will not give him up?"

"Not if he is a friend of yours—nix-ee! So lead ahead. I'm on the war-path, gunnin' for points, and all I want is a lok at Grilly, to size him up. Where is he?"

"Come with me and I will show you."

They walked down the road, until they came to a large cornfield, in the vicinity of the barn where the murder had been committed.

Climbing over the fence, they walked down one of the aisles, until they came to one of the center furrows, following which they soon came to where Gril Guyandotte sat upon the edge of a corn-hill, his jetty, gleaming eyes distinguishable in the darkness.

When, by a touch on the arm, Sam Slabsides was made aware that he was near the Gypsy, he opened the cap of his lantern, and caused a flood of light to descend in the path ahead.

The light was so suddenly produced, that Guyandotte sprang to his feet, with an unintelligible utterance.

"It is I, Gril!" Floss said, whereupon the Gypsy assumed a less defensive attitude.

"Is this the boy?" he demanded, scrutinizing Sam, keenly.

"This is the identical chap," Sam responded good-naturedly. "I am Samuel Slabsides, the slab-sided future senator from Slumgullion. What der yer wanter interview me about?"

"A matter of importance," Guyandotte replied. "Sit down, and turn that light lower. I see your broadcloth will stand dirt."

Both Sam and Floss became seated upon the corn-hills, and with the lantern in the furrow between them, the trio made rather a weird group.

"Yes, my togs hev made the acquaintance of dirt, before this, ef I know anything about it," Sam said.

"Tain't bin one o' my misfortunes ter sleep on the soft side of a mattress, very lately. Good everyday hemlock barn floor has stood in fer me, wi' once in a while a sprinklin' o' hay, fer sheets. But ther river is clear o' boats—so sail ahead. What der yer want with me?"

"I wanted to have a talk with you, regardin' the murder of the young feller. A warrant has been issued for my arrest, has there not?"

"I believe there has; anyhow, there's bin some tall huntin' for you for the most o' the day."

"So I am aware. But they didn't find me, nor they wouldn't have taken me alive, if they had. For I had no hand in the murder, and I don't intend to be hauled up for it."

"You didn't commit the murder?"

"I did not."

"Well, then, what are you hidin' fer?"

"Because, suspicion having pointed toward me, from the simple fact that one of the Jamison brothers quarreled with me, I deemed it necessary not to expose myself. Being a Gypsy, and consequently, one of a class of people that are none too well thought of, I was fearful that were I to be caught lynch-law might be brought into play."

"Mebbe it would. The people aire up on their dignity. You kin bet yer life, an' I wouldn't give much fer the murderer's chances, when he's found."

"That was what I presumed. So I kept out of sight. Have you any idea who committed the murder?"

"Dunno as I have, in partic'lar,—that is, none that I'd want to sling around loose, jest at present."

"Still, you have an idea?"

"Mebbe."

"And so have I, my young friend. I want you to take me by the hand and believe that I am your friend, and then we will set to work together, to bring to justice one of the worst villains that was ever a disgrace to society. Will you do it? I am no murderer, although up to a couple of years ago I led a wild and not altogether an honest life. Two years ago I changed my habits and although I still remained a Gypsy, I have since led a life beyond reproach. To the truth of this statement, Floss, here, will certify."

"Yes, Gril is telling you what is so," Floss said.

"He has been very kind to mamma and I."

"That settles it, then," Sam said. "Ef you say

so, that's all ther insurance I want, you bet! So put 'er thar, mister, an' ef Sammy Slabsides can do ye any good, he's yer mutton, ev'ry stew."

"Good!" Gril Guyandotte cried, putting out his hand, and warmly shaking that of the younger Bohemian. "You'll lose nothing by accepting of my friendship. I don't suppose you have any idea that I have been cognizant of your every movement, for the past two months, and that at no time has our Gypsy camp been more than twelve or fifteen miles away from you?"

"Git out!"

"It is true. I have had spies keep track of your route, from day to day, and report to me at night, and we have arranged our route accordingly."

"Ye don't say so! An' what hev ye done that fer?"

"So as not to lose track of the blind beggar, Felix Jacobi."

Sam gave vent to a prolonged whistle of surprise.

"D'ye know him?" he demanded.

"Not as a personal acquaintance, nor does he know me. I know of him, however, and of the man who was the cause of his ruin."

"Then, you're the very hairpin I want to see—jest the werry old pompadour pin. Kinder struck me I hadn't got ther luck ter start gunnin' 'thout hittin' a bird. So you know ther story o' Felix's misfortunes, do you?"

"Yes. Do you?"

"Yes, I reckon I do. At any rate he told me about it."

"In the main, he no doubt told you a correct story. But there are some parts in which, I dare say, he erred."

"Dunno 'bout that, I'm sure. Felix ginerally spoke dictionary facts."

"Of course, but even the most truthful of people, often make sad mistakes. Now, where is the old man?"

"That's the very thing I want to know. He's missing, and I'll bet he's met with foul play."

Sam then went on and narrated the circumstances relating to Jacobi's mysterious disappearance.

"Floss has told me of this," Gril said, when Sam had finished, "and I agree with you that some secret disposal has been made of Jacobi. Are you aware that his enemy and the direct cause of all his woe, lives scarcely more than a stone's throw from here."

"You mean Milo Mitchell?"

"Yes."

"Keerect. I know where he lives. He's known around these 'ere parts, as Judge Jamison."

"Exactly. And on Jacobi's hard-earned money he is playing off gentleman. I know it, now, but until yesterday I had no idea of his whereabouts. I then saw him driving through the lane, but he didn't see me. Last night, I paid him a visit and we had a little talk, during which I gave him several little reminders that I was not any too friendly toward him. Finally, he made me an offer of money, if I would put Felix Jacobi out of the way. I allowed I would accept it, though at the time I had not the slightest idea of doing anything of the kind."

"Then, it don't look as if Jamison had had a hand in Felix's disappearance, after all."

"Don't deceive yourself, on that point. Knowing that Felix was in the vicinity, and ascertaining that he was not with you, I naturally took the cue that something had happened. So, last night—previous to the alarm of the murder—I visited Jamison at his home, and made known to him that Jacobi was in the neighborhood, bent on revenge. I sized up his surprise—rather, his assumed surprise, and came to the conclusion that he was not so much surprised as he let on to be. Floss, here, had previously told me of her meeting with you and of your missing Felix, and of course it did not require much thought, on my part, to lead me to suppose that Mitchell had become apprised of Jacobi's coming, and adopted stringent measures to provide for his summary disposal."

Sam whistled again.

"Say, looker here!" he ejaculated, "be you a college professor, or a walkin' dictionary? Them jaw-breakers o' yours don't correspond wi' yer profession."

Guyandotte smiled.

"I was not always a Gypsy," he assured. "Once upon a time I moved in the society of upper tandom, but it did not benefit me, for it was the cause of my making a move that took me down hill, until I did not amount to much in the eyes of honorable people. Once down—and, you will do well to remember it, my boy—it is a hard thing to rise. And thus it was, with me. I was ashamed to make the effort, after once going astray. So I joined the Gypsies and am now the leader of the party camped in the lane—a more respectable set of wanderers than whom it would surely be hard to find."

"Since I have reformed, I have undertaken to right the wrong that I was party to, several years ago. With that view, I never wholly lost track of Felix Jacobi, after he was blinded. I believed that, sightless though he was, he would eventually find Milo Mitchell, and I was not wrong. After many wearisome miles of wandering, he came so near to the lair of his enemy that I was able to lay my eyes upon that enemy. And having done that much, it is my intention to bring matters to a just ending. Recognizing your assistance to Jacobi, as a guide, it is an honor to know you, and therefore I propose that we work hand in hand, to the end of seeing that the fearful outrage visited upon Jacobi by Milo Mitchell be avenged."

"Keerect, old stockin'! That's where you hit me for a home run!" Sam declared. "Tain't often I

tackle onto hullsale partnership, but when I do, I freeze faster than a Cape May crab. So go ahead wi' yer talkin' masheen, an' let's heer what ye think is ther best thing ter be did, under the circumstances. I'm wi' yer fer any kind o' sport, from a torchlight parade, to a funeral procession!"

And Sam turned the light of his lantern a little brighter, and waited for Guyandotte to proceed.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE MYSTERY.

"WELL, I do not know exactly what plan of action to advise, just yet," Guyandotte said, after some deliberation, "because we neither of us know just where Jacobi is, or what has happened to him. If we were positive, as regards these points, it would be a far easier matter for us to lay our plans."

"That's so. I've got it fastened ter my noddle, tho', that Jacobi is hid 'round the haunted house premises, and I sha'n't give up that opinion until I've made the trap another vestigation. I was goin' there when I met Floss."

"Are you not afraid to go there alone?"

"Nixee! I've got a revolver, an' ef ther ghosts come foolin' around, I'll give 'em plumbago by the ounce."

"Floss was tellin' me about the ghosts and their vocal manifestations. That's all nonsense. There is no such thing as ghosts!"

"That's what I thought, until one of 'em hit me a sockdolager alongside me jaw; then I changed my tune from A to B-flat, which was purty near bein' flat—fer when I looked ter see who had struck me, I couldn't see no one."

"So Floss told me. But there is no such thing as a ghost. It stands to reason that the manifestations at the mansion are wholly human, and your idea that Felix is a prisoner about the premises is quite plausible. In order to make a positive move against Milo Mitchell, with any degree of success, we will have a great deal to contend with. In the first place, we will have to locate Felix Jacobi, and, in doing so, use the utmost caution, in order that I be not discovered, nor that Jamison's suspicions be aroused that we know of Jacobi's whereabouts, lest he put the poor old fellow entirely out of the way."

"Then you don't think he has caused him ter be killed?"

"No. The terrible job he did out west must naturally have preyed so upon his mind that he would hesitate to actually commit murder. It is far more probable that Jacobi is held as a prisoner."

"But where?"

"That's fer us to find out, if we can. It appears quite likely that, as he disappeared up at the mansion, he isn't far out of that neighborhood now."

"It looks that way, I know. But Floss and I ransacked the place from top to bottom, without findin' anything."

"Even so, but that does not gainsay that another search might not result in a discovery. There is likely some secret apartment or other arrangements, that, if thoroughly examined, would explode the ghost business. If I thought I would not be in danger of being discovered, I would accompany you now."

"Dunno how that would be. You'll have to run your own risks. There might be some one up at ther old ghost-trap, an' ag'in there might not."

"I think I'll go along with you anyhow, I am armed, and not afraid to face the music, if it comes to that. Floss, you had better go back to the camp."

"No, I am going with Sam," the girl said, spiritedly.

"Yes. Floss an' I is pards," Sam spoke up, "an' I want her ter go along."

So the trio set out.

A considerable part of the way to the foot of the bluff, on top of which was located the mansion, could be traveled by way of the cornfield, not necessitating getting out into the highway.

The night was pretty dark, however, and when they left the cornfield there was not much danger of their being seen.

"Who do you think killed Frank Jamison?" Sam asked of the Gypsy, as they hurried along.

"Well, if I were to express any opinion, I shouldn't hesitate to point my finger at Milo Mitchell. I hear that both were rivals for a girl's hand in marriage, and Mitchell is a man who hates to be balked, and I don't think he'd hesitate at any crime, where a pretty woman was concerned."

"It struck me he might know es much erbout it as any one else. But how's er feller ter fasten it onto him?"

"It will not be an easy matter, I can assure you. He has power and influence, and we have neither. Were he to get me into jail, he would center all his power against me, to secure my conviction, you may rest assured."

They reached the base of the bluff in due time, and toiled up the precipitous path to the level above.

Though the deserted mansion loomed up grim and forbidding, the gloom was not as dense as on the previous night, and there was no lightning or thunder to add to the uncanniness of the situation.

"Now, then, ef the screechin' will begin, we'll try an' keep our hair from stan'in' on end!" Sam Slabsides declared, grimly. "So sail in, Mister Ghost, an' split yer bugle from ear to ear."

They cautiously approached the house, which presented the same appearance as on the previous night.

When they stepped upon the veranda, Sam paused to light his lantern, Floss keeping by his side, as though she deemed him her natural protector.

Gril Guyandotte, however, stalked on into the great gloomy hall, fearlessly.

"Let him go!" thought Sam. "I'd rather snort ef he'd git lambasted alongside the jaw!"

A moment later, a startled and fierce cry was heard, and the Gypsy reappeared, in hot haste.

"Hillo! what's the defickelty?" Sam demanded.

"Quick! bring the light!" Gril gasped, drawing his revolver. "Some one struck me, curse him!"

They hurriedly entered the hall, and Gril led the way into the parlor.

Here Sam turned on his light, at full head, and flashed it about the room.

But, although they all gazed searchingly about, the offender was nowhere to be seen, nor was there any obstacle in the room behind which a person could be hidden, without risk of detection.

"He's gone, curse him!" Gril cried vengefully.

"Who?" demanded Sam.

"Why, the man who slapped me!"

"Git out. It wasn't no man. I got slapped in the same way, last night, and on looking around instantly, there wasn't a soul in the room. There's no way o' gittin' round et, Gril—et were a ghost that hit you, an' he kin hit like a prize fighter, too."

"Ghost be hanged! There is no such thing as ghosts! Give me that lantern!"

He took the light, and examined the room carefully.

He sounded the walls, and the floor, looked behind the pictures and furniture, and finally uttered an exclamation:

"It beats the devil!" he declared. "There's no explanation to the mystery in here, that I can see. Come! Let's proceed. If there's any secret compartments to the house, you can bet I'll find them!"

"Ef you do, yer eyes will have to be sharper than I think they are," was Sam's opinion. "I'm bettin' I kin look as fur inter a bowl o' eyester soup as any one else, but I've been left on seein' ther eyester, many a time. But, steer ahead, me boy. Mebbe you're more of a ferrit than I take yer ter be."

They went over the same course that Sam had pursued the night before, visiting the remaining rooms on the first floor, then exploring the cellar, and finally the upper stories.

The cellar, in particular, Guyandotte spent some time in examining, but nothing was found to indicate that the place was not all *bona fide* cellar.

Three hours of rigid examination of the premises supplied but one result—that of deciding there were no secret compartments, cellars, or other places of concealment, where one or more persons could exist in hiding.

"Well, I'm satisfied on one point!" Guyandotte announced, finally, when they had gained the piazza once more. "Old Jacobi is no prisoner around the premises."

"He ain't?"

"Not much! He has been spirited away. Our search has been so thorough, that, were he secreted hereabouts, we should have been sure to discover him."

"I don't know about that. How d'yer 'count fer the slap on yer jaw?"

"That? Well—well, that is the only thing that mystifies me. It must be some person was in the room and dodged out, before I could see him."

"Thet langwidge an' logic might work on Fegees, an' sech like, but I don't tackle to et, fer a cent. When I got slapped, I wheeled around quicker'n a cat could wink 'er eye at a spring chicken, an' I was all alone. I tell ye, I believe the place is haunted, an' ther ghosts aire like cannibals—allus on the gobble."

"Nonsense. There are no ghosts. Neither have I heard any of their vocal manifestations yet, either."

As if to give the lie to his words, there pealed forth, at this juncture, a shriek so blood-curdling and awful, that even Guyandotte started, with an oath.

"Thar! now ye hear it!" Sam cried in triumph. "That war the ghost gittin' up on his mad, cause you 'lowed he warn't er co'poration by hisself. Or, mebbe ye think et was er Thomas Cat, or some strange angel out serenadin'."

Guyandotte did not answer, but drew his revolver again, and looked at it to satisfy himself that it was in working order.

The yell of the disturbed spirit, whether it was embodied or disembodied, had sounded down from above them, and it was plain it had not been uttered from the ground floor.

"You stay here with the light!" Gril ordered. "I'll be cursed if I don't find out what the racket is before I leave the house."

He pulled off his heavy boots and left them on the piazza, then, with his weapon in a firm grasp, he tipped into the hall, and the last seen of him he was going up-stairs.

Sam Slabsides chuckled softly as the Gypsy disappeared.

"Just wait a bit," he said to Floss. "Ef the spooks don't skeer the life out o' him et will be a queer thing to me, I tell yer."

"I hope he won't get into trouble," Floss replied, "or turn up missing, like Felix did, for without him mother and I would fare badly. He has been very kind to us, sir."

"Oh! he'll not git lost, like Felix, fer he's gone up above, an' there ain't any way fur him to get down except by the stairs. Ef he don't come down 'em three at a time, I'm off my guess."

Just then from the upper and front portion of the house there broke forth a wild, demoniac laugh, as if some one were in triumphant glee over something that had happened.

"Guess Gril must be ticklin' ther ghost!" Sam suggested.

"Oh! maybe the ghosts have captured him!"

Floss added, clasping her hands anxiously. "Oh! what *would* mamma do if Gril were lost?"

"Don't fret, Floss. Ef the feller don't come back purty soon, we'll go and investigate."

Then they sat down on the steps and waited.

Five minutes passed.

All remained silent within and without the mansion.

The stillness finally grew so impressive that Floss laid her hand upon Sam's shoulder.

"Oh! Sam," she said, "I fear something really has happened to Gril. Won't you go see?"

"Wait a bit. He hasn't had time to look into half the rooms yet. He'll be down purty quick."

But fully five minutes more passed without the seeing or hearing anything more of Guyandotte; then Sam did not offer to delay any longer.

"Come!" he said, rising. "We'll go up and see what yer Gypsy friend is up to, anyhow."

They entered the hall, and with the lantern to guide them, ascended the stairs.

At the top of the first flight they paused and listened, but could hear no sound of footsteps, nor, indeed, any sound at all.

"Mebbe he's layin' in wait fer the spooks," Sam suggested, although, in truth, he was not free of misgivings as to Guyandotte's strange absence. "He want's ter hear where the yell comes from, so he kin blaze away. We'll see which room he's in."

They visited every room and looked into every closet of the second story, but Gril was nowhere visible.

They then ascended to the third story and began their investigation there.

And it was only when they searched the last room that Sam's hope gave way to unbounded surprise.

Guyandotte was nowhere to be found, nor any trace of him.

He was not in the second story!

He was not in the third story!

What did it mean?

Had he been mysteriously swallowed up, the same as old Felix Jacobi?

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! Where is Gril?" exclaimed Floss, wringing her hands and almost crying. "I told you something would happen, Sam!"

Sam puckered up his lips and looked puzzled.

"Yer can set me down fer a red-hot stove-lid, ef there ain't something all-fired queer about this matter," he replied. "Mebbe, tho', we're cryin' afore the milk is spilt. Gril might 'a' tip-toed down-stairs an' goin' ter searchin' ther rear o' ther house, 'thout our hearin' him. Come!"

They hurried down-stairs far more anxious than when they had ascended.

When they reached the ground floor, a glance showed them that Guyandotte was not on the veranda.

The lower rooms were then all subjected to a search, but to no purpose; no Guyandotte was to be found.

Thoroughly excited, now, Sam rushed to different parts of the house, and called the Gypsy's name, but in vain; the echo of his voice was all the answer he got.

"Oh! dear! oh! dear!" Floss cried, "what *shall* we do—oh! sir, what shall we do?" and she burst into tears.

"What shall we do?" Sam replied, as they once more sought the piazza. "Why, I s'pose you'll do what you've allus done, won't ye?"

"Oh! sir, but you don't understand. There will be trouble with the Gypsies if Gril cannot be found. You see, the majority of them are not in favor of mother's being their queen, 'cause she has always kept them from stealing. It was only because they fear Gril that they have not turned mother off, before this. If they find Gril has disappeared for good, we shall be turned out of the camp, on the pitiless world, friendless and without means to help ourselves."

"Ye don't say!" Sam exclaimed in answer. "Well, if *that's* the racket, don't let it worry yer little head, one bit. Et aire a fac' as plain as er elephant's nose, that Gril *has* disappeared, more 'steriously then er hobgoblin in a fairy play, leavin' no Choctaw trail behind him. Thet ain't sayin' he won't be found, tho'. An' ef he ain't, d'ye know what I'll do?"

"No. What?"

"Why, I'll jest step inter Gril's cast-off pants, an' espouse yer mother's cause, by bein' boss of the camp, myself. Mebbe Gril's pantaloon might be a mite too plathoric fer my corporosity, but, when et comes ter flightin', an' runnin' er town, Slammy Slabsides is the werry chap fer bizness. But—hillo! D'ye see thar? Gril's boots have also eloped!"

In entering the house, the Gypsy had left his boots upon the veranda, as we have stated.

They had now as mysteriously disappeared as had the bandit himself!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GYPSY QUEEN.

THE astonishment of Sam and Floss, as they made the last discovery, was unbounded, and they stood for several minutes staring at each other, in silence.

The boots were certainly gone from where Guyandotte had left them, and as Gril had disappeared, it was but natural to suppose that, whoever had captured him, had also captured his boots.

"Oh! this is terrible. What is to be done, Sam?"

Floss asked, now the picture of despair.

"I'll be blamed ef I hardly know," Sam replied, rather dubiously. "I'm a slabsided senator from Slumgullion, ef this ain't ther ripest case fur pure ninety per cent cussedness thet I ever got hold of."

Ther ghosts weren't satisfied wi' gobblin' enter Gril but they've seccoped in his boots, in the bargain! Don't 'pear to me there's any use of makin' any further search."

"What! would you leave Gril, here, in the power of enemies, Sam?"

"Nix-eel—not ef I could help myself. No more would I leave Felix in ther same perdicikment. But, what's a feller ter do? Hain't we s'arched an' s'arched, and found nary a hide nor hair o' either of 'em?"

"True; but it seems hard to leave them to an unknown fate."

"Fact, sure; but, what else kin we do? We might jest as well set down an' suck our thumbs, as ter s'arch any funder. Felix an' Gril hev either evaporated, an' gone up the spout, or else they've been kidnapped an' taken prisoners. Ef the latter's the case, their captors will keep 'em hid so we can't find 'em, you can bet yer bangs."

"Well, then, what shall we do?"

"About the best idea is fer us to git away from here, before we get into a scrape, ourselves. I want ye to take me to yer camp, an' let me see yer mother."

"What for?"

"Oh! I want to see her. I've got kinder of an idea I can help her. Yer see, old Norris, where I'm puttin' up, might be persuaded to take you an' her in, as housekeepers. He's rich, an' what's more, he's kinder s'uck on me, an' guess he would do anything I asked him ter."

"Oh! do you really think he would take us in, so we could leave the Gypsies?"

"Yes, I do. He's a boss old chap."

"Then I will take you to see mamma."

They left the bluff, and bent their steps toward the Gypsy camp.

Little was said, on the way, for Sam's mind was so preoccupied that he had no time for conversation.

When they entered the camp in the lane, Sam's eyes lit up with enthusiasm; camp-fires burned brightly, reflecting a vivid glare against the sky, and on either side were the white, canvas-covered wagons. Flitting about in the firelight were numbers of the dusky nomads; others were tucked away in their wagons.

There were but three tents, the larger one of which evidently belonged to the queen of the tribe.

The Gypsies eyed Sam curiously, as he accompanied Floss into the camp, and they were near the queen's tent, when a man stepped forward, and laid his hand upon Floss's shoulder.

"My child," he said, reprovingly, "where have you been at this late hour, again?" And there was an angry scowl upon his sun-tanned, beardless face.

He was a tall, angular man, attired after the style of a clergyman of bygone days, and, at the age of forty or thereabouts, lacked considerable of being of prepossessing appearance.

"Let me go! Take your hand off my shoulder, Parson Jim!" Floss cried, with flashing eyes. "You have no right to touch me, sir."

"Haven't I? Well, we will see about that, my pert miss. I happen to have charge of this camp, during Gril Guyandotte's absence and I intend to rule as I see fit. Where have you been?"

"To look for Gril, if you are so particular to know!"

"Oh! ye have, eh? Did you find him?"

"No."

"D'ye know where he is?"

"That's my own business, sir. Come, Sam!" and wrenching herself from Parson Jim's grasp, Floss hurried toward her mother's tent, Sam bringing up the rear.

"Hold up there, boy!" Parson Jim cried, authoritatively. "Come here; I want you!"

"Do ye?" Sam flung back. "Well, you go beat your brows with a brick-bat till I come back," and with this he entered the tent with Floss.

Peering out, he saw the parson sit down by a camp-fire, evidently to wait for him to come out.

When Sam turned around from the entrance, he found himself in the presence of the same dark-clad woman who, in some as yet unknown manner, had wrought such violent agitation to Dolly Denning.

The fortune-teller was now unmasked, however, and wore no bonnet.

The light of a lamp upon a stand near her showed her to be a woman of some forty years, and there were lines upon her forehead that betrayed her familiarity with trouble and sorrow.

Once she had been a woman of marked beauty, and still retained her good looks to a considerable extent, for her eyes were brilliant and her features of pleasant expression.

Taking Sam by the hand, Floss led him forward.

"Mamma, this is the young gentleman I was telling you about," she said. "Sam, this is my mother, Queen Sheba."

"I am glad to see you, sir," the queen said, putting forth her hand. "Floss seems to have taken a liking to you, and her friends are my friends."

"An' I'm crackin' glad to see you, ma'am, for you see, I an' Floss make a hull team, 'cept she hain't got as much nerve as she has good sense. 'Spose she's told you 'bout things up at the haunted house?"

"She told me about the singular disappearance of an aged companion of yours. I don't think you mentioned his name—did you, Floss?"

"No, mamma. I told Gril, first, and he said I'd better not mention the name."

"Gril did? Why, that is strange. What was your friend's name, sir?" and the Gypsy queen looked inquiringly at Sam.

Sam hesitated, as if doubtful if he had better out with what he had to say or not.

"Well," he said, finally, "ef my calculations ain't off their base, you uster call my old side-pardner husband! His name was Felix Jacobi!"

The Gypsy queen uttered a startled cry, and made an attempt to rise, but sunk back upon her chair.

"What?" she gasped.

"Jest as I sed," Sam replied. "Felix and I have been a snucksin' it, sence snow went off. Tho't you know'd et, 'cause Gril did."

"I have been aware that Gril was shaping his route so as to keep on track of the poor old man, but I did not suspect he was so near. And my surprise is greatest that I—"

"That you should be 'spected by me, o' bein' Felix's former wife?"

"Yes."

"Well, ye see, when Felix an' I set out on ther tramp, he told me his story, an' I never fergot it. So, as we tramped tergether, I kept a weather eye out, hopin' we might run across Felix's enemies. When we got hereabouts, et turned out we weren't fur off track; so, considerin' things thet have transpired, an' what I've found out, an' puttin' this an' that together, I arriv at the conclusion that you were Jacobi's wife, an' thet Floss was his daughter."

"Indeed! You say you heard Felix Jacobi's story?"

"Yes'm; the bull yarn!"

"Did it reflect any discredit on me?"

"He did not know that you were alive, until two or three years ago. Then he learned that, instead of bein' dead, you hed skipped ther tra-la-lab-loo wi' Milo Mitchell."

A groan of anguish escaped the Gypsy queen, and she buried her face in her hands.

When she once more raised her head, tears glistened in her eyes.

"Great God in Heaven! what a hideous wrong the scheming of one villainous wretch can accomplish!" she moaned. "Oh! boy, I have been fearfully wronged, I as well as Felix. Can you give me a brief account of what he told you?"

"Guess so, tho' I ain't much o' a talker. Wouldn't 'a' never learned how to talk, myself, ef it hadn't been for my own gumpum."

"But, ter begin: Felix sed he went West, years ago, ter seek his fortin', an' left you an' two girls behind. You had a payin' store, an' did not need for anything; so ther first few years he was in the West, he didn't send any money home, but banked it where he was. At the end of five years he sent ye home ten thousand dollars, directin' you ter deposit it to his credit, in the home bank."

"He did, and I acted according to his wishes."

"Well, it wasn't long after this that he got notice from his cousin, Milo Mitchell, that you, your two daughters, an' his sister, had died o' typhoid fever, and were buried in the family cemetery. Having no ties now ter draw him immedgetly back East, Felix sent Mitchell a good-sized check on the home bank, orderin' him to erect grave-stuns over yer grave."

"'Bout seven years later he started for the East wi' another fortune of twenty thousan'. He was stopped by highwaymen, robbed, an' the leader of the gang put vitriol in his eyes, which blinded him. They then cleared out, but, as Felix remembers, the voice of the chief an' Milo Mitchell's were just alike. Well, Felix swore he'd have revenge, if it took him all his life, and set forth as a blind beggar. For the last few years he has wandered from place to place, finally reaching his old Eastern home. Heer a surprise was waitin' fer him."

"He learned the deaths Mitchell reported had never taken place—that Mitchell had enlarged the check Jacobi sent him ter the full amount o' the bank account, and that you and he had eloped, taking one daughter with you. His sister had also decamped with the other daughter, and that was about all that was known."

"Still revengeful—more so now than ever—Jacobi set out, in the belief that Providence, as he called it, would yet guide his footsteps ter where he would meet those who had wronged him. This spring I met him, an' we've tramped together sence till last night, when he so mysteriously evaporated."

"Disappeared, you mean?"

"Yes, tho' evaporated hits it, too."

"Did Felix have any idea how near he was to us?"

"Yes, I think he did, fer he hed been sayin', ther past week, that intuition told him he was nearin' the end of his journey. This, I took it, meant his everlasting journey, fer the o' d gent has been goin' down hill fast fer some little time, an' I didn't 'spect ter hev his company very much longer."

A look of unutterable sadness passed over Mrs. Jacobi's face.

"Poor Felix!" she said. "God grant he may live until all can be explained. And, now, my dear boy, perhaps you would like to hear my story. It isn't long, and maybe you will not believe it. Lut, as God is my witness, it is true."

"Of course I'd like to hear et, ma'am. I ain't one o' them kind as will b'lieve all o' one side o' a story without hearin' t'other side."

"You are very sensible. My husband did go West, as you have said. He was ambitious to acquire a competency, and the gold fields offered the most attraction. I encouraged him, and he went. I had a little store that brought myself and children in a comfortable living, and there was no need for him to send his earnings home. We corresponded regularly, and all went well. After five years' absence, he sent me the ten thousand, and it was deposited to his credit in the home bank, as I was not in need of it."

"Shortly after this, he wrote me he was about to enter a mining syndicate, and needed every cent he could get—or, at least, I supposed he wrote the letter, until I found different when too late. He told me to dispose of all we had in the East, draw the money from the bank and join him in the West, bring Florence with us, and leaving Dora behind, in Judith Jacobi's charge, until she should finish her studies."

"Milo Mitchell was named to help me, and to see me safely West, and the check sent was payable to him, my husband saying he could take better care of the money en route."

"I had been acquainted with Mitchell but a short time, and knew nothing particularly about him, and trusting implicitly in my husband's good judgment, I made hasty preparations and we started."

"It was not till we were beyond the railroad terminus, alone on the prairie that Mitchell made known to me the terrible truth. My husband, he declared, was dead, and the letter a forgery, perpetrated by his, Mitchell's, own hand, with a view of securing the whole fortune. On leaving the East, he confessed that he had caused to be left behind undeniable proof that I had eloped with him, thus having ruined me in the eyes of those who had always known me to be a true and honorable woman. So, the only refuge left for me, he declared, was to settle down with him in the West, under another name, and live with him as his wife."

"You can imagine my horror and indignation. Of course I scornfully refused to accede to such a proposition, and thereupon, he deserted us in mid-prairie, without food or means. We managed to get back to the bounds of civilization, where I sold my jewelry, realizing enough money to provide for our immediate needs."

"To test the truth of the scandalous report he had told, I caused a home paper to be sent to me. Then I saw he had not lied. The papers gave a glaring account of the elopement and said were either of us to show our faces at that place again, we would be tar-and-feathered."

"Of course I did not return home. I wrote to Judith, but never received an answer. I wrote to California, to Felix, but never got a word in return. The trouble so wore on me that I think I should have committed suicide, had it not been for Floss, here. Finally, I met a schoolday chum, who had turned Gypsy, and after hearing my story, he induced me to join the tribe. I did so. As years passed by, the tribe grew large and a division was deemed advisable. It was made, and I was made queen of the new tribe, which position I have since occupied."

"Nearly three years ago Gril Guyandotte joined us, and I learned that he had recently left Milo Mitchell in the West. From him I ascertained that my husband was not dead at all, and also was told of the terrible indignity that had been practiced on Felix. Guyandotte, for some years previously to that outrage, had been Mitchell's valet. After that crime he was so horrified that he resolved to lead a life of honor and repentance. After finding me and hearing my story, he joined hands with me in swearing that Mitchell should be punished."

"After much roving we got on track of Felix—not until he had reached his Eastern home, however, and learned, as he supposed, of my infidelity. Lut Mitchell we could not find. After getting on track of Felix we never lost it. Time and again have I prayed to go to him, get down on bended knees, and try to convince him of my faithfulness, and of how much we have both been wronged, but on every occasion Guyandotte has restrained me."

"What for?"

"Because, he argued that the proper time had not yet come for a reconciliation and reunion. 'Wait,' said he, 'and be patient. As sure as I believe in an All-wise Being, I believe that Felix Jacobi will, in his wanderings, yet guide us to where Milo Mitchell is living in luxury on his ill-gotten gains. Then, vengeance and vindication can be accomplished at one and the same time.' So I desisted, though it wrung my heart to do so."

"Then you do not know that Gril's prophecy turned out O. K.?"

"Yes, I know that Milo Mitchell lives here, under the alias of Jamison. Gril made this discovery."

"So did I, an', as sure as there's hair on a cat, we'll make it hot fer the judge, afore long!" Sam declared.

He then went on and apprised Mrs. Jacobi of the singular disappearance of Guyandotte.

She was greatly alarmed.

"Oh! this is so unfortunate!" she said, explaining the feeling in the camp against her and Floss. "Parson Jim is my bitter enemy because I refused to marry him, and he swore to-day, if Guyandotte did not put in an appearance before morning, he'd drive us from the camp."

"He won't have the chance!" Sam declared, making the same proposal to her that he had to Floss. "I'm sure farmer Norris will take you in."

"You are very kind; but are you not exceeding your authority? I could not think of going there without being positive that I would be allowed to tender my services in return for our food and shelter."

"Oh! that would be all right, without the least doubt. Lut, ter satisfy ye, I'll go and see, an' then come back for you."

"Very well. We will await your return, anxiously."

And so Sam Slabsides left the tent.

As he did so he saw Parson Jim skulk away into the shadow of a wagon.

That he had been listening to the conversation carried on within the tent was evident.

Sam set his teeth, grimly.

"That chap is a rascal!" he muttered. "But he'd better not offer to harm them."

CHAPTER XIV.

SAM GOES FISHING.

SAM SLABSIDES went at once to Honeybrook farm, and finding farmer Norris still up, apprised him of all that had occurred since he set out to the Van Gelder mansion.

The farmer listened attentively, and when Sam had finished he nodded his head slowly.

"Strangel strange!" he said. "We pass through this life with but a vague idea of what is going on around us. Astounding villainy and horrible crimes creep close to our hearthstones, and yet we are oft times unaware of the fact—unmindful but what the world is as fair and peaceful to all others as it is to ourselves."

"Yas, mebbe that's so," Sam admitted; "but thar's a heap o' difference twixt livin' in luxury, an' bein' grow'd up in the gutters uv a big city from ther time ye'r the size uv a cigar stub. We gillies w'ot wer' fetched up in ther lap of an alley, 'stead o' the lap o' luxury, don't forget thet thar's folks gittin' knocked around the world—not by a jugful! But say—what 'bout Mrs. Jacobian's my chum Floss?"

"Bring them here, most certainly. My home shall be theirs as long as they choose to remain, and if this singularly separated family can be united, nothing in the world will do old John Norris's heart more good."

And so Sam went back to the Gypsy camp and conveyed the good news to Mrs. Jacobi and Floss, and bundling up the few effects they had, they started to accompany Sam from the camp.

They were intercepted, however, by Parson Jim, who, with an ugly scowl upon his face, stepped in their path.

"Hold up, here!" he commanded, authoritatively. "May I make bold to inquire where you are going, madam?"

"I am goin' to leave camp, sir. You said if Guyandotte did not return before morning you would drive me out. So I will save you the trouble."

"You cannot go."

"What?"

"You cannot go. I rule this camp, now, and my word is law. Return to your tent at once; and as for this young ragamuffin—" and Jim turned to glare savagely at Sam.

His expression changed, however, and he uttered a broad oath.

This was caused by his discovery that a revolver was leveled directly at him by the young tramp. The weapon was cocked, too, and Sam looked as if he would rather pull the trigger than not.

"Say, lookee heer, mister!" he cried, "der ye see me gun? Ef ye do, an' yer know which side yer bread is buttered on, you'd better take a quiet sneak! Mebbe Sammy Slabsides is a rag'muffin, an' all that sorter thing, but he ain't afeard o' no long-gear'd giraffe like you! So you step aside, and let us pass, or by the great high-kickin' Christopher Columbus I'll shoot the eyewinkers off'm you. *Gil!* There's not a minute to spare!"

That Sam meant business, Parson Jim did not seem to doubt, for swearing roundly, he stepped to one side, and allowed the trio of friends to pass out of the camp.

"Oh! I tell yer, when I git me dignity up I'm er reg'lar daisy-bender!" Sam chuckled, as they hurried away toward Honeybrook farm. "Mebbe my senatorial phiz ain't as classic as that o' the Jersey Lily, but my infloence is jest as sure ov the per-simmons."

They reached Honeybrook without further incident, and here Mrs. Jacobi and Floss were so heartily welcomed by the sturdy, big-hearted old farmer, that they could not help but feel at home.

Several days passed.

Frank Jamison was buried, his funeral being one of the largest ever known in those parts.

Neither Ralph Jamison nor Dolly Denning attended it, although the former spent an hour of silent mourning before the coffin of his murdered brother, prior to the services, which were held at Larchmont.

As for Dolly Denning she could not attend, for when the news of the murder reached her, she was prostrated with grief, and fever and delirium set in, making it necessary for her to have the attendance of a doctor.

Doctor Kendall was her attendant, his services having been provided by Judge Jamison.

Although the local authorities were wide-awake, hoping to capture Gril Guyandotte, they were, of course, unsuccessful.

Guyandotte was nowhere to be found.

This fact did not seem to dispel the belief that he was hiding in the neighborhood, and would yet be secured.

The general belief was that the dashing Gypsy was the murderer, and should he be found, there were large chances that he would never be given a legal trial, but would be hanged to the most convenient tree.

And, what was Sam Slabsides doing in the mean time?

Practically nothing.

It was not because he was not eager to proceed with his case, but because he did not know just how to set to work in a way that would entail any certainty of success.

He flit ed here and there, about the neighborhood, seldom putting in much time at the farm; he had examined the Van Gelder mansion twice, by daylight; he had lurked around Larchmont, and spotted the movements of the judge; but all to no use.

He knew just as much at the end of the four days succeeding Gril Guyandotte's capture, as he had known before—and no more.

The Gypsy camp still remained in the lane, by order of the sheriff, while at Honeybrook farm, Mrs. Jacobi and Floss had settled into their position of housekeepers for the farmer, and they wrought such a bright and cheerful change in the place that Mr. Norris was more than pleased.

"It seemed like old times, when Betsy was alive, an' sprucin' things up," he remarked, with enthusiasm; and as for Sam, the old man seemed to take a keen interest in him.

Early in the morning of the fifth day succeeding Guyandotte's disappearance, being tired of racking his brain with thought, Sam concluded to rest himself with angling for some of the varied species of fish said to exist in the Dark Pond.

So he rigged himself a rod, attached his line and hook, secured some bait, and set out.

After wandering along the shore of the pond for some time, he finally found a shady nook, just back of Ivy Cottage, where he felt sure the fish would bite.

Sam had learned from farmer Norris of the vinegary nature of Priscilla Tanglefoot, and he concluded that before he began to fish, he had better try and strike up a bargain with her, or there might be war.

So approaching the cottage, Sam found the spinster in a rear a-bor, where she was vigorously manipulating a churn handle.

She stopped short, when she saw Sam, and eyed him suspiciously.

"Mornin' to ye, ma'am!" Sam said, doffing his hat in true Chesterfieldian style. "Be you the proprietor o' this 'ere Garden o' Eden?"

"I am the proprietress!" Priscilla declared. "I am Miss Tanglefoot. What do you want?"

"Tanglefoot did you say?"

"Yes!"

"Jeh! but that's a reg'lar old daisy-bender of a name, ain't it? Reckon yer paternal pergeniter must ha' bin a rail-fence contractor, eh?"

"None of your insolence, sir. What do you want?"

"Me? Why, I want to strike up a bargain wid yer."

"What kind of a bargain?"

"Waal, yer see I spied a place back o' yer house, where I calculated fish might bite. So, bein' a square sort o' a rooster, I sed ter myself, sez I: 'Sam! Slabsides, et wouldn't be right fer yer ter make a monopoly o' this thing, an' ketch all ther fish wi'out dividin' ther spoils, like ev'ry Senator does. Fer instance, heer's a poor lone widder!'"

"Widder!" fairly screamed Priscilla. "Why, you impudent hussy, I'm no widow. I'm a respectable maiden lady."

"Ye don't say!" and Sam with difficulty choked back a snort of laughter. "Why I thought you'd been married. Ye look it. But, as I was sayin': 'Here's a poor lone maiden lady, an' mebbe she hev a tooth fer fish'; an' so I jest trotted up ter see ef I couldn't get yer consent ter let me fish, an' I go halvers with ye."

"You give me half you catch?"

"Yes, that's my way ov doin' business wi' wimmen."

"All right, sonny—go ahead and fish. You appear like a nice, honest sort of a boy, and I'll send you out a bowl of buttermilk, pretty soon. Do you like buttermilk?"

"You bet! I jest dote on et. An' ef ye should make a mistake and put a hunk o' bread into it, I'd overlook et, an' say you were a saint, or suthin' o' the sort."

And with a laugh, Sam skurried back to the fishing-grounds.

"I'm in luck," he muttered. "I've made a mash on the old maid, slap-dab. She didn't kinder sweeten to my 'widder' racket, but I guess it's all right, an' I'm solid fer the buttermilk."

When he had fairly got settled down to fishing, Sam found that he had not overestimated the spot. The fish bit splendidly, and in an hour's time, he had called in quite a number of the finny tribe, some of which were bass full two pounds in size.

Fishing was a prime sport, with Sam, and he became so engrossed in his occupation, that he was unaware of any one being near at hand, until a pleasant voice caused him to look around and behold a young lady sitting on the grass just behind him.

The young lady was Miss Dolly Denning, and beside her, on the grass, was a little pail of buttermilk.

"Phew! hill!" Sam ejaculated, staring at her. "I thought you was sick."

"You did? Why, how do you come to know anything about me, sir?"

"Oh! I've heard o' you. Yer Dolly Denning, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir. But who are you?" and Miss Denning regarded the boy eagerly.

This was the first morning she had been able to be out of doors since the murder, thanks to Dr. Kendall's efficacious treatment. She was looking pale and wan, and there was a look of deep sorrow about her eyes and mouth.

"I'm Sam Slabsides," the young fisherman replied. "Unless you are familiar wi' Senatorial government matters, guess you never heard o' me. Glad ye'r gittin' better, tho'. Spect yer tuk it orful hard about Frank's death, eh?"

"It was a great shock to me," Dolly replied, her lip quivering. "But, you speak as though you knew him?"

"Kinder reckon I did. 'Twa'n't but a few hours before I discovered the murder that he an' I had a confab over yender, 'cross the lake."

"You did?"

"Yes'm."

"Then, you are the boy who discovered the murder?"

"You bet."

"What were you and Frank talking about, over yonder across the lake?"

"Dunno's I orter tell you. Yer don't look well."

"Oh! tell me! tell me! I can bear anything now for I have become reconciled to my loss."

"Ye liked Frank, then?"

"Ay! I worshiped him!"

"He didn't think so. He found out that you was givin' ther judge a show in ther game."

"But I'll tell yer 'bout the lake. I found Frank over yonder jest in ther act o' gittin' ready ter commit susanside."

"What?"

"Yas, he was takin' off his togs an' was goin' ter drown his sorer in ther pond. He got all ready nigh 'bout ter shuffle off; then, lookin' over here, he raised his hand on high, like a Bartholdy statue an' sez: 'Oh, Dolly! Dolly! Dolly! how c'u'd yer be so cruel, when yer knew I loved yer so!' or suthin' ter that effect; then he spouted a lot about yer marryin' the judge, an' allowed he'd give ther fish a square meal by soakin' in ther bottom o' the pond."

"Jest then, I, Sam! Slabsides, who was sittin' on ther fence takin' it all in, axed him hed he any objections ter my 'propriatin' his earthly togs ter me own use, arter he war safely registered on t'other side o' Jordan. When he see'd me he got mad as a hornet an' concluded ter postpone the job. He tried ter bribe me not ter tell on him but couldn't, an' that made him madder yet, an' mountin' his horse, he rid off like greased lightnin' after a speckled hen."

"This is very strange; I never gave him any cause to believe but w'at he was my preference."

"Pears he'd got et inter his head that yer was engaged ter marry the judge."

"I was forced into that promise," Dolly said, growing slightly paler, "but I never intended to keep it, as Frank should have known. Do you think, then, that he committed suicide, and that no one murdered him?"

"Nix."

"Why not?"

"'Cause I axed him ef he did et an' he sed no."

"Poor Frank!" Dolly said, and she held her handkerchief to her eyes. "I loved him so much."

"Don't cry," Sam said. "Tain't no use cryin'; besides I'll lose all appertite fer the buttermilk. Jest hand et heer, an' see me make et evaporate."

"Oh! I cannot! I cannot believe that it is Frank who is dead!" Dolly sobbed.

"Yer can't?"

"No, no! I try to believe it, but something seems to whisper to me—" "No, it is not Frank!"

Sam finished the buttermilk—a good three pints of it, too—and wiped his mouth on his shirt-sleeve.

"Well, now that yer come ter speak about et, I don't believe et wer' Frank, neither."

"Oh! don't you?"

And Dolly looked up with piteous eagerness.

"Oh! I'm so glad!"

"Yas, I've hed my doubts all along ef et were Frank who is dead."

"But the one who is living claims to be Ralph!"

"Yes, I know he does, but et has struck me he was playin' the part fer a purpose. 'Pears Frank sed the day of the murder, that you shouldn't marry the judge, if he had to shoot you both at the altar. Mebbe he's playin' off Ralph in order that he may wait for that time to come."

"I don't think that could be his object. Oh! sir, I wish you would see him and tell him that I want to see him on a matter of importance. If I could only have a few minutes' conversation with him, I could settle all doubts as to his identity."

"I'll do it, by Jingol! When ye want any trottin' errands did jest call on me. When d'ye want to see him?"

"Any time he can make it convenient to call."

"All right. You can bet I'll see to it jest as soon as I kin get me peepers sot onter Ralph—as he calls himself."

Dolly went slowly back toward the cottage, a gleam of hope in her sad eyes. Sam gave up fishing, and dividing his large mess with Miss Priscilla, much to her gratification, he set out for Honeybrook farm, with his mind on his splendid catch rather than on matters more important.

CHAPTER XV.

SAM "EAVESDROPS."

At Larchmont, after the funeral, things took about their usual course.

It would be some time yet until the sitting of the Court, and the judge kept closely to home.

Indeed, after the funeral, he was not seen to leave the premises at all, and, if he did, it was at such a time as he would not be observed.

This seclusion, some of the neighbors alleged, was owing to Frank's demise.

Jessie also remained wholly within the house, and as for Ralph, the only place he did go was to R—, where he drank more moderately than had been his wont, and positively declined to join his old associates at the gaming-table—"on account of Frank's recent death," he said.

He was moody and uncommunicative, and more than one person hinted that something was wrong with him.

Just after lamp-light, the evening following the occurrences last narrated, Ralph was lounging upon a sofa in the parlor at Larchmont, with a book in his hand.

He was not reading, but appeared intent upon

studying the outlines of a shadow upon the ceiling, caused by the chandelier.

The entrance of the judge caused him to glance at that personage, but he made no effort to rise.

As for the judge, he drew a chair near to the sofa, back of which was a bay-window, the thick lace curtains of which fell just behind the sofa.

"What's the matter, Ralph? Are you not feeling as well as usual since Frank died?"

"As well as usual—yes."

"Then why are you so gloomy? Something must disturb you, for you were always light spirited."

"Frank's loss, of course, oppresses me."

"I am sorry to hear that. Now, Ralph, I've got a communication to make to you that may startle you. Can I trust you to keep forever the secret I am to tell you—this, when I tell you that for keeping that secret you will, in a very short time, become sole owner of Larchmont, and have five thousand dollars to jingle in your pocket?"

"You can!" was the unhesitating reply. "I'm not so scrupulous at trifles as Frank was."

"Showing that you have sound sense. But, to explain: Circumstances have arisen, owing to a past which you know nothing about, that make it imperative I should get out of this country without delay. When I go, I wish to take Dolly Denning with me, but, I fear she will refuse to leave on such short notice, or to marry me at all. But she must. I will not be baffled!"

"I understand, sir."

"Very well. Here is my plan, and you must help me to carry it out. To-morrow evening early, you are to visit Miss Denning, announce to her, in secret, that you are really Frank Jamison, instead of Ralph, and propose to row her across the pond, to the opposite shore, where a minister is in waiting, and there be married."

"She will refuse, of course!"

"Don't fool yourself. With regret I am forced to acknowledge that she loved Frank devotedly, and her promise to marry me was extorted by threats on the part of Priscilla Tanglefoot. On finding Frank alive, she will be overjoyed, and a little persuasion on your part will induce her to take the trip—you promising her to keep the marriage a secret."

"Well?"

"Well, when you are about in the middle of the pond, you are to ask her to smell of a handkerchief I will furnish you, which will be highly perfumed. One sniff will place her in the power of a potent drug, and she will take another sniff, declaring the perfume to be delicious, and then, without suspicion, she will soon become unconscious."

"Well?"

"Well, I will be close at hand in a boat, relieve you of your charge, and that will be the last you or any one else will ever see of us on American soil. I have my plans all laid, and shall not fail. After I'm gone, Larchmont and five thousand in the R—bank to your credit, are yours."

"But I guess not! How am I to account for the girl's disappearance?"

"Oh! that's easy. Your call at the cottage must be short, and, in that interview, you must arrange matters to have Dolly slip out of the house at eleven, and meet you on the pond shore."

"Priscilla and she occupy different apartments, and the former invariably retires at nine o'clock. So she'll be asleep when Dolly leaves; and when it turns out that both Dolly and I are missing, it will naturally be concluded that we have eloped, and no blame will fall on you."

"And I am to receive five thousand dollars and Larchmont for this?"

"Yes."

"What's to become of Jessie?"

"Let her get married."

"This is to be done to-morrow night?"

"Yes. There is another thing I will let you into when you promise to do as I have outlined."

"I promise, certainly. I'd be a fool not to."

"Very well. That part of it is settled, then, and I shall depend on you. Now for the other: Have you had any suspicion that, for a couple of years back, a counterfeiting plant has existed in this town?"

"Yes."

"What gave rise to such a suspicion?"

"That ghost racket up at uncle Van Gelder's mansion."

"Well, you are right. A gang has existed, and the thing has worked mighty successful. Besides myself, I have three confederates. They do the work; I am the boss—they simply are my employees."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. The plant is so securely hidden that all search has failed to find it. It has brought me in riches. When I am gone do you want to fill my position?"

"I do, you bet!"

"Very well. I will arrange it. When I am gone one of the men will wait upon you, in the dead of night, and conduct you to the scene of the operations."

"How about the ghost business?"

"That's all easy. Pipes run between floors and ceilings, so that any person in the mint can cause a yell to go to any part of the house. The mysterious parlor slap, that has puzzled so many, is administered by one of the men, the quickest person you ever saw. He can slap you and disappear through a noiseless trap before you can turn around. The trap is not in the floor, but in the side of the wall, directly in the opposite direction you would be looking when you wheel around after being slapped."

"The trap is a thin rubber panel, dividing in the center, when pushed against, and is painted so as to resemble a solid panel of woodwork. A noiseless leap carries him through this panel, which instantly

closes, leaving no sound or trace of the mysterious assailant."

"A clever invention I should say."

"Yes. When you come in charge, all that will be necessary will be to frighten people away from the place, by the methods that have been resorted to, heretofore, and to be careful not to get nabbed, in circulating the bogus. I cannot stop to explain more fully, now, for I have some other business to attend to. But I shall expect you to fulfill your promises, and keep my secrets."

"To the letter!" Ralph assured. "I like money and luxury, and shall not be backward 'bout availing myself of opportunities of getting those commodities."

"Correct. I shall depend on you, and what arrangements are needed, I will attend to, to-morrow. With the understanding that all is settled, I'll go and attend to some other business, now."

And arising, he left the house, by the front way, and went up the road, toward the Van Gelder mansion.

As he did so a figure climbed out of the window, in the rear of the sofa where Ralph Jamison was lying, and followed the footsteps of the judge, like a grim shadow.

It was Sam Slabsides!

Bound to get hold of such points as he could as well as to see Ralph, he had lurked in the vicinity of Larchmont, from the time it became dusk; then, seized with a sudden impulse to know what was going on in the mansion, he had easily gained entrance to the parlor, through the bay window, and so had overheard every word that had passed between the two, and, as may be imagined, it was a very edifying conversation to hear.

So when Judge Jamison left Larchmont, Sam went after him, like a sleuth, his face flushed with excitement, and his eyes gleaming.

At last, he was on the true trail!

Judge Jamison undoubtedly was about to visit the secret mint; and if so, Sam meant to be not far behind.

His surmise he found to be correct, for the judge went straightway to the bluff, and ascended the path.

When he reached the top of the bluff, he halted, and gave three low whistles.

A moment later they were answered by two other whistles, of like nature.

These seemed to be signals inquiring and answering if the coast was clear; for the judge now strode rapidly forward, and entered the mansion.

Sam Slabsides was not slow to follow. When the judge entered the parlor, Sam slipped noiselessly in after him, and hid himself behind the sofa, as the deep darkness permitted him to do.

The judge seated himself on a chair, and gave a couple more whistles; then a minute later Sam became aware that a third party had entered the room.

"Is that you, Tighe?" the judge asked.

"You bet," was the reply. "Isn't it dangerous for you here?"

"Why?"

"Some one might come prying around."

"Bah! The coast was clear when I came. Are the other boys below?"

"No. There was no work of their kind, ready for 'em, so they went off hunting, to-day."

"You shouldn't have allowed that."

"Why not?"

"Because they're not so trusty as you, Tighe. How are the prisoners?"

"The Gypsy is furious, and I wouldn't want to be in the neighborhood were he to get loose. He's got a fearful temper."

"Humph! You've got him caged so there's no possibility of his getting free?"

"I should smile! But, he raves about like an enraged lion, judge."

"Let him rage. How is the old man?"

"Feeble, sir, very feeble. His confinement seems to bear heavily on him, and I don't believe he will live two days more."

"So much the better!" the judge declared, unfeelingly. "When he is dead, sink him in the pond. As for the Gypsy, if you won't kill him, why, there's no other course to pursue but to hold him a prisoner."

"About the best plan, I guess. I ain't staining my hands w' murder, these days!" Tighe asserted with spirit. "Did you see your son?"

"Yes."

"How about it?"

"Oh! he will succeed me, when I am gone, and you can keep right on at work, as usual."

"All right. Only, can he be trusted?"

"Certainly! He is red-hot for gain, and will not give a thing away if there's money to be made out of it, you may bet!"

"Very well. How about that young tramp?"

"Why, if he comes nosing around here, any more, secure him, also. It will not do to run any risks, and if there is any liability of the mint being discovered, sink the whole plant in the lake, and skip!"

"I should smile."

"I must be going now, and it is not probable I shall visit you again. So, I'll bid you good-by, and wish you good luck."

"Good-by, Cap! We'll stick by the new boss, same as we did by you, 'long's he treats us right."

The two shook hands, then the judge took his departure, while Tighe walked to one side of the room and disappeared.

"Oh! I'm onter ye, cully!" Sam mused. "Yer a reg'lar cute daisy-bender, but yer kin bet yer buttons yer ain't cute enuff ter waltz around Sam Slabsides, when he's got his Senatorial saffron dusted

over his phizy—nix-ee, Sarah Jane! I'm goin' ter investigate ther mint, or bu'st my b'iler in the attempt!"

CHAPTER XVI. A BOLD VENTURE.

Tighe had as good as said, in his conversation with the judge that he was alone.

It was this fact that decided Sam to go to the rescue of old Felix Gril Guyandotte.

Tighe did not appear to be a large, or powerful man, and somehow, it occurred to sturdy Sam that he could handle him.

When Tighe had been gone some ten minutes, Sam emerged from behind the sofa, and stole toward the point where Tighe had last been seen.

In the center of the side of the room, where Tighe had disappeared, was an open fire-place, with a marble mantle above it.

At either side of this fire-place, broad panels of plain walnut ran from floor to ceiling.

It was one of these panels that, instead of being wood, was simply two wide hinged strips of rubber, so artistically painted as to resemble and correspond with the other woodwork of the apartment.

When Sam reached the panel, he paused and listened.

Not a sound could he hear, to indicate human presence, on the other side.

Pressing his hand slightly against the panel, he saw that it was indeed rubber.

He did not immediately attempt to push through, however, for it occurred to him that such an action might be dangerous, but soon he made up his mind to go it whole hog or none!

"I'll make the attempt, ef I git the hull top o' me head blowed off!" he said, grimly, and the next minute, with his revolver firmly grasped, and ready for use, he pushed steadily against the panel.

The novel door parted in the middle, and opened, inward, and Sam stepped across the threshold, allowing the rubber to spring noiselessly back to its place.

Sam had imagined his move would bring him into impenetrable darkness, but he was agreeably disappointed.

He found himself in a small apartment, some ten feet long, by four wide. On one side were the clapboards of the house, on the other the partition that separated the room from the parlor. A lantern suspended from the ceiling, furnished a dim light.

There was a floor to this room, and a carpet upon it. At the further end, a steep staircase ran downward, ever so far.

After taking a survey of his surroundings, Sam advanced to the stairway, and began a cautious descent.

What might await him, below, he had no means of knowing, but he was keenly alert to his situation, and nerved for a struggle.

Down! down! he went, step after step—it seemed as if the staircase was endless.

He passed below what he calculated must be a line of the bottom of the cellar of the mansion, and after a descent of a few more steps, came to the end of the staircase.

He now found himself in a large underground room, lit by a lantern suspended from the ceiling, and saw at once, that he was in the counterfeiter's den, for tables, stools, and the paraphernalia of the profession, were scattered around on every hand.

At the further end from where Sam had halted was a rude sort of desk.

Tighe was seated at this, with a lamp before him, and his back was turned toward the spy.

As near as Sam could judge, he was sorting over a pile of money.

Before making any further move, Sam took a keen survey of the apartment.

He concluded there was another cellar, for there was a door, at Tighe's right, which was closed and secured with a padlock.

Having completed his observations, Sam stole cautiously toward where Tighe was seated.

It will be remembered that the boy was in his bare feet; consequently, his footfalls were so noiseless the counterfeiter could not hear them.

When Sam was within a few feet of his man, he leveled his weapon, and cried:

"Tighe, you are my prisoner!"

With a startled oath, the counterfeiter sprang to his feet and gazed around, only to see the polished steel tube leveled full at his heart.

"Stand and deliver!" Sam continued. "Make a move to disobey, and you're a dead man!"

"Ten thousand curses!" Tighe gasped. "What do you mean, you accursed rat?"

"I mean that I've caught you right in your trap!" Sam declared, triumphantly; "and the only thing for you ter do is ter cool down and come ter time, like a little man. I've got the bead on you, and if you try any monkey business with me, I'll put the contents o' this revolver inter yer corporosity, quicker'n scat. D'ye hear?"

"The deuce take the luck! What brings you here?"

"I'm in ther hullsake detective an' rescuin' bizness at present. I want a couple o' friends o' mine, an' after that I propose ter pull this heer j'int, you bet!"

"For the love of God, spare me!" Tighe groaned. "If it were to get to my wife and children that I am engaged in this business, it would kill them!"

"That's none o' my bizness, mister. Yer orter tho't o' that afore this. Ef you've got any weapons about yer duds, jest fling 'em on ther desk thar; an' remember! my finger's on ther trigger!"

Tighe immediately obeyed, by drawing two revol-

vers from his pocket, and depositing them upon the desk.

"I have no intention of resisting!" he declared, "but I pray to God you will spare me. Think how heavily this disgrace will fall on those who are dear to me. Spare me, and I swear before the Almighty I'll leave off this sort of life, and forever after this live honest and upright."

"Well, we'll see about that, after a bit, Tiger, old boy. Fer the present, ther's matters o' more importance ter attend to. Git yer key ter thet door, and unlock it!"

Tighe hesitated.

"If I set the prisoners free, you won't let the Gypsy assault me, will you?" he demanded, uneasily.

"No. Go ahead."

Tighe then drew a key from his pocket, and unlocked and opened the door; then, taking the lamp, he led the way into another but smaller cellar, off of which, were built two stone dungeons, with iron-grated doors.

The counterfeiter unlocked these, and flung them open.

"Come out!" he cried. "Your freedom is at hand."

Gril Guyandotte promptly stepped forth, and the moment he saw Sam, he sprang forward, with a glad cry.

"My true friend!" he cried. "So I owe my liberty to you, eh?"

"Sorter," Sam replied. "This feller, Tighe, 'pears repentant, so we'll be easy on him. Felix! come out!"

The sound of the lad's voice caused the old man to hobble forth; but his step was feeble, and he tottered, unsteadily.

"Is that you, Sammy?" he asked, faintly.

"Yes, Felix, it's me, all right side up with care," and Sam went forward and took the old man by the hand.

"How aire ye feelin' Felix?"

"Very poorly, lad, very poorly. I cannot live but a few hours longer, I fear. My strength is nearly gone. Some one has been telling me of all the villainy of my enemy, Sammy, and that my wife was not untrue to me."

"I have explained everything to him," added Guyandotte—"things you have not yet learned."

"I know all," Sam replied. "Mrs. Jacobi and Floss are even now under my protection."

Then turning to Felix, he added:

"Yes, Felix, it is true. Your wife proves to have been sinned against, fully as much as yourself, by ther son-of-a-gun, Milo Mitchell. But, Milo's rope is peterin' out toward the end, an' 'fore many hours more he'll be in prison."

"No! no! that must not be. Law must not touch I'm, for such would not be the vengeance of Felix Jacobi. Take me first to my wife and children, that they may be near me when I die. When I have heard their voices I shall be happy. Then I want Milo Mitchell brought before me, and forced to deliver up all the money he robbed me of."

"All right, Felix. We will arrange et all O. K."

Sam and Gril then went one side.

"What does he mean by children?" Sam asked.

"Does his other gal live around here?"

"Yes. She is called Dolly Denning, her real name being Dora Denning Jacobi. The Priscilla Tanglefoot of Ivy Cottage is really Judith Jacobi, Felix's sister. She conspired with Mitchell to ruin Mrs. Jacobi, and no doubt received a large sum of money."

Sam then made known the plot he had overheard, concerning Dolly's abduction.

"Do you believe Ralph means it?" Gril asked.

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because I believe the present Ralph is in reality Frank, and hating the judge, he has grasped at this opportunity to get the bulge on him."

"If so, and we could get the young fellow on our side, that would be our prime chance to nab the judge, and force him to restitution."

"You bet!"

"Then you see him, and arrange it. Take Jacobi to his wife, and bid him be kept out of sight, so that no one knows he is there."

"And you?"

"I and Tighe will remain here, and capture the other two counterfeiterers when they come—that is, if he will help me, for his liberty."

Tighe was called and questioned, and readily consented to assist to capture his two pals, on promise that none of them should be brought to court.

The capture was to be made in order that no word should reach the judge, to alarm him to hastier action that might enable him to escape.

After the plans had been arranged, Jacobi was given a swig of brandy, and then Gril and Sam carried him out of the cellar and to the foot of the bluff, where he was placed upon his feet, and Sam assisted him to walk slowly toward Honeybrook farm.

In half an hour the blind father and husband was locked in the embrace of his wife and daughter.

Though tears were freely shed, they were tears of joy and forgiveness, and all was happiness and gratitude, Sam and farmer Norris being nearly as much interested in the gladsome reunion as the participants themselves.

Felix asked for his elder daughter, but was told that that would not be possible quite yet, and was finally prevailed upon to lie down, as it was feared that after the first excitement had worn away he would be weaker, and such a sudden relapse might prove fatal.

"Of course I can't see you," he murmured, "but I cannot complain. God has been merciful and blessed me by restoring you to me in my last days,

and I am content. As He has been merciful to me, so will I be merciful to mine enemy. He smote me sorely with affliction. I will retaliate by allowing him to go hence in search of a better life. The thought of his villainy will be more punishment to him than all the horrors of a life of imprisonment." And perhaps his was the truest and best vengeance—who shall say?

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

THE next morning, bright and early, Sam set out in search of Ralph Jamison, and found him lounging in under the trees, in front of Larchmont.

At a motion from the boy, Ralph arose, and followed him down the road.

Here a halt was made, under a big maple tree, and Sam came to the point, like a little man.

"Jamison," he said, "d'ye know what I think o' you?"

"No. What?"

"I think ye'r too cute ter live!"

"Do you, really? What causes you to believe that?"

"Ther racket ye'r playin'. 'Tain't right, tho', fer a man w'ot's a corpse, ter be cuttin' 'round like you are. In short meter, sir, I know you're Frank Jamison, and that it was Ralph who was killed!"

"You do?"

"I do, you bet!"

"Well, since you're such a knowing lad, what of it?"

"Good bit. Why don't ye go ter Ivy Cottage, like a man, tell Dolly ther truth, an' make her happy? She's pinin' away like a wilty flower, fer you."

"She is?"

"You bet!"

"How do you know?"

"'Ca'se I had a interview wi' her, an' she sed she loved yer, an' wasn't goin' ter marry the jedge—that she'd been forced ter make the promise; thet she didn't believe you were dead, an' she wanted me ter git ye ter come an' see her."

"Did she tell you this?"

"Hope I may never see Christmas, ef she didn't! It would do her more good than forty doctors, ter see ye. Come, now, you're Frank Jamison who was goin' to commit suicide, ain't ye?"

The young man remained silent a moment, and then he nodded assent.

"I know'd it. Know'd it all along. But, how 'bout thet bargain ye made wi' ther jedge, last night?"

"What?"

"Thet bargain ye made wi' yer dad? Oh! I know all about it, so yer needn't be s'prised. I was right behind the sofa an' heard every word!"

"The deuce you say!"

"Oh! you bet. I'm a reg'lar daisy-bender at findin' out such things, I am! But, I tho't I twigg'd yer racket. Yer didn't like ther jedge sev'ril hundred weight, an' when yer see'd a chance ter get him into yer power, yer jumped at it."

"You've hit the nail precisely on the head, my young friend. You could not have guessed closer."

"That's what I tho't. Now, will yer hev patience, an' listen ter a little story I've got ter tell yer, that will prove yer foster-father ter be one o' the most cussed mean rascals thet ever lived?"

"Yes. Go ahead."

So Sam did go ahead.

He began at the beginning of the Jacobis' stories, and touching all points and incidents, as he proceeded, told the whole singular history through, now and then, by some odd expressions, relieving the narrative somewhat of the monotony of its shocking details.

Frank Jamison listened without interruption, until Sam had finished, when he said:

"This is certainly a remarkable case, but I doubt not its truth. For several years I have been impressed with the opinion that the judge had a dark past. So Jacobi proposes to let the judge go scot free, does he?"

"Yes—that is, if the judge refunds all the stolen money, which, with interest and all, amounts to in ther neighborhood o' forty thousan' dollars."

"He can do that, for he has twice that amount in the bank. Well, go ahead, and let Jacobi secure his object. Then, I shall have a word to say."

"What?"

"I shall have the judge arrested, on the charge of murdering my brother!"

"Do you think he did it?"

"Yes. He bore me no good will, because I was Dolly's suitor. He no doubt laid in wait for me, and seeing Ralph, pounced upon and killed him, in the supposition that it was I."

"How came you at R—, that night?"

"I was discouraged, disheartened and reckless, and thought I'd try getting drunk, to drown my sorrow. The cure was worse than the disease. When I found Ralph had been killed, I concluded to step into his place, so as to better observe the judge's intentions, that I might baffle them."

After some further consultation, it was fixed that Frank should row out in the boat that night, but instead of taking Dolly with him, Sam and Gri were to be his passengers, and they were to surprise and capture the judge.

Sam then returned to the farm-house.

About noon, Gri Guyandotte put in an appearance.

Tighe's two pals had been taken, he said, and under solemn promise to lead better lives, had been left at the den under Tighe's surveillance as it was thought best that they should remain there and

keep up appearances, in case the judge might take it into his head to pay another visit.

Frank Jamison called during the afternoon, and stated that Jamison was locked in his room at Larchmont, and appeared to be making preparations for a journey.

He had, during the forenoon, drawn all his money from the bank at R—, and no doubt, when he was captured, it would be found about his person.

Night drew slowly on, dark and threatening a storm.

At the farm-house the friends waited anxiously for the hour for action to arrive.

It came at last, and found Frank Jamison, Sam and Guyandotte on the shore of the pond.

Thoroughly armed, the two latter lay down flat in the skiff, while Frank took the oars, a dummy woman had been improvised for the occasion, and lay partly on the bow of the boat.

Guyandotte, who was an expert at lasso-throwing, was armed with a strong line, which he was to use, in case Mitchell should attempt to drown himself.

Thus equipped, the little craft pulled out over the dark surface of the pond.

Half-way across a low whistle was heard, which Frank answered; then a voice called out:

"Straight ahead, Ralph!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" was the response.

Then, a moment later, the outlines of the judge's figure could be discerned, as he stood up in his boat.

"Have you got her, Ralph?"

"I have."

"That's right. Pull close alongside!"

Just then, Gri and Sam arose, and the snake-like lasso shot through the air and pinioned the villain's arms to his side.

"Stand and deliver!" Sam ordered. "Make no effort to escape," he cried, "or you will be shot full of holes."

Mitchell swore fiercely, and tried to jump overboard, but he found himself in the strong arms of Gri Guyandotte, who flung him flat in the bottom of the boat, and held him there, while Sam bound him, hand and foot.

The capture had been neatly made, and Milo Mitchell was at the mercy of those whom he had so foully wronged.

To relate, in detail, what followed, would be, in one sense, to go over what we have already narrated.

Mitchell was taken to the farm-house, and there confronted by those whom his machinations had caused so much sorrow and suffering.

Sam acted as spokesman, and preferred the charges with the pointedness of a criminal lawyer.

With a stolid, sullen face, Mitchell heard, making no denial, saying nothing, excepting to occasionally utter an imprecation.

When asked what he had to say, his reply was:

"Nothing. I have no regrets to make, only that it is not in my power to kill you all. Do your worst. Force me even to the gallows, if you will. As boldly as I've lived, that boldly will I die!"

He seemed utterly bereft of care what became of him, his brutal instincts now so held the mastery.

When told that the Jacobis would press no charge against him providing he gave them forty thousand dollars, and furnished ten thousand additional, for the maintenance of his own daughter, Jessie, and a like amount to Frank, he at first refused, but finally consented, and paid over the sixty thousand dollars.

Frank then ordered him to leave the country, under penalty of hanging, for killing Ralph.

As may be supposed, he lost no time, in accepting this advice.

One year later, he died in New Orleans, on his death-bed confessing to murdering Ralph and John Van Gelder.

The disgrace fell so heavily upon Jessie that she pined away, and died, and Larchmont fell to Frank, who, when he made known his identity, was regarded as a prince of brave fellows.

Although Felix made no effort to injure her, Judith Jacobi left Ivy cottage, and no one ever heard of her afterward.

With their restored fortune, the Jacobis and their two lovely daughters, had nothing more to desire.

The Van Gelder mansion was purchased, remodelled, and now is a grand home. Felix spent his last days there, dying not long after being reunited to his family.

Subsequently, after a proper period of mourning, Dolly was married to Frank.

And there are two more weddings likely to come off, at no far distant day—that of Gri Guyandotte to Mrs. Jacobi, and Mr. Samuel Slabsides to Miss Floss Jacobi!

For be it known, when farmer Norris passed away to his last home, he left to the tramp detective all his real and personal property—quite a nice fortune.

And, as Sam is a promising citizen, it is to be hoped that his "senatorial" aspirations will some day be realized.

THE END

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